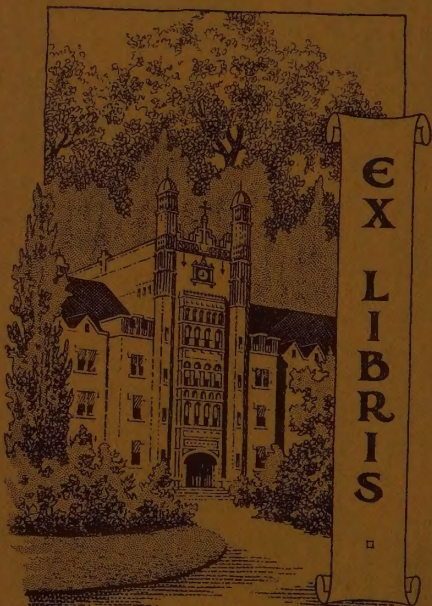
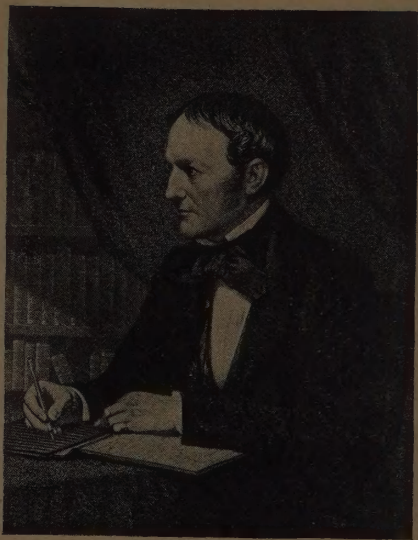




MARYGROVE



Mr. H. Prescott

BIOGRAPHICAL

AND

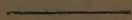
CRITICAL MISCELLANIES

BY

WILLIAM H. PRESCOTT,
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CHARLES BROCKDEN BROWN.

THE class of professed men of letters, if we exclude from the account the conductors of periodical journals, is certainly not very large, even at the present day, in our country; but before the close of the last century it was nearly impossible to meet with an individual who looked to authorship as his only, or, indeed, his principal means of subsistence. This was somewhat the more remarkable, considering the extraordinary development of intellectual power exhibited in every quarter of the country, and applied to every variety of moral and social culture, and formed a singular contrast with more than one nation in Europe, where literature still continued to be followed as a distinct profession, amid all the difficulties resulting from an arbitrary government, and popular imbecility and ignorance.

Abundant reasons are suggested for this by the various occupations afforded to talent of all kinds, not only in the exercise of political functions, but in the splendid career opened to enterprise of every description in our free and thriving community. We were in the morning of life, as it were, when everything summoned us to action; when the spirit was quickened by hope and youthful confidence; and we felt that we had our race to run, unlike those nations who, having reached the noontide of their glory, or sunk into their decline, were naturally led to dwell on the soothing recollections of the past, and to repose themselves, after a tumultuous existence, in the quiet pleasures of study and contemplation. "It was amid the ruins of the Capitol," says Gibbon, "that I first conceived the idea of writing the History of the Roman Empire." The occupation suited well

with the spirit of the place, but would scarcely have harmonized with the life of bustling energy, and the thousand novelties which were perpetually stimulating the appetite for adventure in our new and unexplored hemisphere. In short, to express it in one word, the peculiarities of our situation as naturally disposed us to active life as those of the old countries of Europe to contemplative.

The subject of the present memoir affords an almost solitary example, at this period, of a scholar, in the enlarged application of the term, who cultivated letters as a distinct and exclusive profession, resting his means of support, as well as his fame, on his success; and who, as a writer of fiction, is still farther entitled to credit for having quitted the beaten grounds of the Old Country, and sought his subjects in the untried wilderness of his own. The particulars of his unostentatious life have been collected with sufficient industry by his friend, Mr. William Dunlap, to whom our native literature is under such large obligations for the extent and fidelity of his researches. We will select a few of the most prominent incidents from a mass of miscellaneous fragments and literary lumber with which his work is somewhat encumbered. It were to be wished that, in the place of some of them, more copious extracts had been substituted for his journal and correspondence, which, doubtless, in this as in other cases, must afford the most interesting, as well as authentic materials for biography.

CHARLES BROCKDEN BROWN was born at Philadelphia, January 17, 1771. He was descended from a highly respectable family, whose ancestors were of that estimable sect who came over with William Penn to seek an asylum where they might worship their Creator unmolested in the meek and humble spirit of their own faith. From his earliest childhood Brown gave evidence of his studious propensities, being frequently noticed by his father, on his return from school, poring over some heavy tome, nothing daunted by the

formidable words it contained, or mounted on a table, and busily engaged in exploring a map which hung on the parlor wall. This infantine predilection for geographical studies ripened into a passion in later years. Another anecdote, recorded of him at the age of ten, sets in a still stronger light his appreciation of intellectual pursuits far above his years. A visitor at his father's having rebuked him, as it would seem, without cause, for some remark he had made, gave him the contemptuous epithet of "boy." "What does he mean," said the young philosopher, after the guest's departure, "by calling me boy? Does he not know that it is neither size nor age, but sense, that makes the man? I could ask him a hundred questions, none of which he could answer."

At eleven years of age he was placed under the tuition of Mr. Robert Proud, well known as the author of the History of Pennsylvania. Under his direction he went over a large course of English reading, and acquired the elements of Greek and Latin, applying himself with great assiduity to his studies. His bodily health was naturally delicate, and indisposed him to engage in the robust, athletic exercises of boyhood. His sedentary habits, however, began so evidently to impair his health, that his master recommended him to withdraw from his books, and recruit his strength by excursions on foot into the country. These pedestrian rambles suited the taste of the pupil, and the length of his absence often excited the apprehensions of his friends for his safety. He may be thought to have sat to himself for this protrait of one of his heroes. "I preferred to ramble in the forest and loiter on the hill; perpetually to change the scene; to scrutinize the endless variety of objects; to compare one leaf and pebble with another; to pursue those trains of thought which their resemblances and differences suggested; to inquire what it was that gave them this place, structure, and form, were more agreeable employments than ploughing and threshing." "My frame was delicate and feeble. Exposure to

wet blasts and vertical suns was sure to make me sick." The fondness for these solitary rambles continued through life, and the familiarity which they opened to him with the grand and beautiful scenes of nature undoubtedly contributed to nourish the habit of revery and abstraction, and to deepen the romantic sensibilities from which flowed so much of his misery, as well as happiness, in after life.

He quitted Mr. Proud's school before the age of sixteen. He had previously made some small poetical attempts, and soon after sketched the plans of three several epics, on the discovery of America, and the conquests of Peru and Mexico. For some time they engaged his attention to the exclusion of every other object. No vestige of them now remains, or, at least, has been given to the public, by which we can ascertain the progress made toward their completion. The publication of such immature juvenile productions may gratify curiosity by affording a point of comparison with later excellence. They are rarely, however, of value in themselves sufficient to authorize their exposure to the world, and notwithstanding the occasional exception of a Pope or a Pascal, may very safely put up with Uncle Toby's recommendation on a similar display of precocity, "to hush it up, and say as little about it as possible."

Among the contributions which, at a later period of life, he was in the habit of making to different journals, the fate of one was too singular to be passed over in silence. It was a poetical address to Franklin, prepared for the Edentown newspaper. "The blundering printer," says Brown, in his journal, "from zeal or ignorance, or perhaps from both, substituted the name of Washington. Washington, therefore, stands arrayed in awkward colors; philosophy smiles to behold her darling son; she turns with horror and disgust from those who have won the laurel of victory in the field of battle, to this her favorite candidate, who had never participated in such bloody glory, and whose fame was derived from

the conquest of philosophy alone. The printer, by his blundering ingenuity, made the subject ridiculous. Every word of this clumsy panegyric was a direct slander upon Washington, and so it was regarded at the time." There could not well be imagined a more expeditious or effectual recipe for converting eulogy into satire.

Young Brown had now reached a period of life when it became necessary to decide on a profession. After due deliberation, he determined on the law; a choice which received the cordial approbation of his friends, who saw in his habitual diligence and the character of his mind, at once comprehensive and logical, the most essential requisites for success. He entered on the studies of his profession with his usual ardor; and the acuteness and copiousness of his arguments on various topics proposed for discussion in a law-society over which he presided, bear ample testimony to his ability and industry. But, however suited to his talents the profession of the law might be, it was not at all to his taste. He became a member of a literary club, in which he made frequent essays in composition and eloquence. He kept a copious journal, and by familiar exercise endeavored to acquire a pleasing and graceful style of writing; and every hour that he could steal from professional schooling was devoted to the cultivation of more attractive literature. In one of his contributions to a journal, just before this period, he speaks of "the rapture with which he held communion with his own thoughts amid the gloom of surrounding woods, where his fancy peopled every object with ideal beings, and the barrier between himself and the world of spirits seemed burst by the force of meditation. In this solitude, he felt himself surrounded by a delightful society; but when transported from thence, and compelled to listen to the frivolous chat of his fellow-beings, he suffered all the miseries of solitude." He declares that his intercourse and conversation with mankind had wrought a salutary change; that he can now mingle in the concerns of life, perform his appro-

priate duties, and reserve that higher species of discourse for the solitude and silence of his study. In this supposed control over his romantic fancies he grossly deceived himself.

As the time approached for entering on the practice of his profession, he felt his repugnance to it increase more and more; and he sought to justify a retreat from it altogether by such poor sophistry as his imagination could suggest. He objected to the profession as having something in it immoral. He could not reconcile it with his notions of duty to come forward as the champion indiscriminately of right and wrong; and he considered the stipendiary advocate of a guilty party as becoming, by that very act, participator in the guilt. He did not allow himself to reflect that no more equitable arrangement could be devised, none which would give the humblest individual so fair a chance for maintaining his rights as the employment of competent and upright counsel, familiar with the forms of legal practice, necessarily so embarrassing to a stranger; that, so far from being compelled to undertake a cause manifestly unjust, it is always in the power of an honest lawyer to decline it; but that such contingencies are of most rare occurrence, as few cases are litigated where each party has not previously plausible grounds for believing himself in the right, a question only to be settled by fair discussion on both sides; that opportunities are not wanting, on the other hand, which invite the highest display of eloquence and professional science in detecting and defeating villany, in vindicating slandered innocence, and in expounding the great principles of law on which the foundations of personal security and property are established; and, finally, that the most illustrious names in his own and every other civilized country have been drawn from the ranks of a profession whose habitual discipline so well trains them for legislative action, and the exercise of the highest political functions.

Brown cannot be supposed to have been insensi-

ble to these obvious views; and, indeed, from one of his letters in later life, he appears to have clearly recognized the value of the profession he had deserted. But his object was, at this time, to justify himself in his fickleness of purpose, as he best might, in his own eyes and those of his friends. Brown was certainly not the first man of genius who found himself incapable of resigning the romantic world of fiction, and the uncontrolled revels of the imagination, for the dull and prosaic realities of the law. Few, indeed, like Mansfield, have been able so far to constrain their young and buoyant imaginations as to merit the beautiful eulogium of the English poet; while many more comparatively, from the time of Juvenal downward, fortunately for the world, have been willing to sacrifice the affections plighted to Themis on the altars of the Muse.

Brown's resolution at this crisis caused sincere regret to his friends, which they could not conceal, on seeing him thus suddenly turn from the path of honorable fame at the very moment when he was prepared to enter on it. His prospects, but lately so brilliant, seemed now overcast with a deep gloom. The embarrassments of his situation had also a most unfavorable effect on his own mind. Instead of the careful discipline to which it had been lately subjected, it was now left to rove at large wherever caprice should dictate, and waste itself on those romantic reveries and speculations to which he was naturally too much addicted. This was the period when the French Revolution was in its heat, and the awful convulsion experienced in one unhappy country seemed to be felt in every quarter of the globe; men grew familiar with the wildest paradoxes, and the spirit of innovation menaced the oldest and best established principles in morals and government. Brown's inquisitive and speculative mind partook of the prevailing skepticism. Some of his compositions, and especially one on the *Rights of Women*, published in 1797, show to what extravagance a benevolent mind may be led

by fastening too exclusively on the contemplation of the evils of existing institutions, and indulging in indefinite dreams of perfectibility.

There is no period of existence when the spirit of a man is more apt to be depressed than when he is about to quit the safe and quiet harbor in which he has rode in safety from childhood, and to launch on the dark and unknown ocean where so many a gallant bark has gone down before him. How much must this disquietude be increased in the case of one who, like Brown, has thrown away the very chart and compass by which he was prepared to guide himself through the doubtful perils of the voyage! How heavily the gloom of despondency fell on his spirits at this time is attested by various extracts from his private correspondence. "As for me," he says, in one of his letters, "I long ago discovered that Nature had not qualified me for an actor on this stage. The nature of my education only added to these disqualifications, and I experienced all those deviations from the center which arise when all our lessons are taken from books, and the scholar makes his own character the comment. A happy destiny, indeed, brought me to the knowledge of two or three minds which Nature had fashioned in the same mould with my own, but these are gone. And, O God! enable me to wait the moment when it is Thy will that I should follow them." In another epistle he remarks, "I have not been deficient in the pursuit of that necessary branch of knowledge, the study of myself. I will not explain the result, for have I not already sufficiently endeavored to make my friends unhappy by communications which, though they might easily be injurious, could not be of any possible advantage? I really, dear W., regret that period when your pity was first excited in my favor. I sincerely lament that I ever gave you reason to imagine that I was not so happy as a gay indifference with regard to the present, stubborn forgetfulness with respect to the uneasy past, and excursions into lightsome futurity could make me; for what end, what use-

ful purposes were promoted by the discovery? It could not take away from the number of the unhappy, but only add to it, by making those who loved me participate in my uneasiness, which each participation, so far from tending to diminish, would, in reality, increase, by adding those regrets of which I had been the author in them, to my own original stock." It is painful to witness the struggles of a generous spirit endeavoring to suppress the anguish thus involuntarily escaping in the warmth of affectionate intercourse. This becomes still more striking in the contrast exhibited between the assumed cheerfulness of much of his correspondence at this period, and the uniform melancholy tone of his private journal, the genuine record of his emotion.

Fortunately, his taste, refined by intellectual culture, and the elevation and spotless purity of his moral principles, raised him above the temptations of sensual indulgence, in which minds of weaker mould might have sought a temporary relief. His soul was steeled against the grosser seductions of appetite. The only avenue through which his principles could in any way be assailed was the understanding; and it would appear, from some dark hints in his correspondence at this period, that the rash idea of relieving himself from the weight of earthly sorrows by some voluntary deed of violence had more than once flitted across his mind. It is pleasing to observe with what beautiful modesty and simplicity of character he refers his abstinence from coarser indulgences to his constitutional infirmities, and consequent disinclination to them, which, in truth, could be only imputed to the excellence of his heart and his understanding. In one of his letters he remarks, "that the benevolence of Nature rendered him, in a manner, an exile from many of the temptations that infest the minds of ardent youth. Whatever his wishes might have been, his benevolent destiny had prevented him from running into the frivolities of youth." He ascribes to this cause his love of letters, and his predominant

anxiety to excel in whatever was a glorious subject of competition. "Had he been furnished with the nerves and muscles of his comrades, it was very far from impossible that he might have relinquished intellectual pleasures. Nature had benevolently rendered him incapable of encountering such severe trials."

Brown's principal resources for dissipating the melancholy which hung over him, were his inextinguishable love of letters, and the society of a few friends, to whom congeniality of taste and temper had united him from early years. In addition to these resources, we may mention his fondness for pedestrian rambles, which sometimes were of several weeks' duration. In the course of these excursions, the circle of his acquaintance and friends was gradually enlarged. In the city of New York, in particular, he contracted an intimacy with several individuals of similar age and kindred mould with himself. Among these, his earliest associate was Dr. E. H. Smith, a young gentleman of great promise in the medical profession. Brown had become known to him during the residence of the latter as a student in Philadelphia. By him our hero was introduced to Mr. Dunlap, who has survived to commemorate the virtues of his friend in a biography already noticed, and to Mr. Johnson, the accomplished author of the New York Law Reports. The society of these friends had sufficient attractions to induce him to repeat his visit to New York, until at length, in the beginning of 1798, he may be said to have established his permanent residence there, passing much of his time under the same roof with them. His amiable manners and accomplishments soon recommended him to the notice of other eminent individuals. He became a member of a literary society, called the *Friendly Club*, comprehending names which have since shed a distinguished luster over the various walks of literature and science.

The spirits of Brown seemed to be exalted in this new atmosphere. His sensibilities found a grateful exercise in the sympathies of friendship,

and the powers of his mind were called into action by collision with others of similar tone with his own. His memory was enriched with the stores of various reading, hitherto conducted at random, with no higher object than temporary amusement, or the gratification of an indefinite curiosity. He now concentrated his attention on some determinate object, and proposed to give full scope to his various talents and acquisitions in the career of an author, as yet so little traveled in our own country.

His first publication was that before noticed, entitled "*Alcuin*, a dialogue on the Rights of Women." It exhibits the crude and fanciful speculations of a theorist, who, in his dreams of optimism, charges exclusively on human institutions the imperfections necessarily incident to human nature. The work, with all its ingenuity, made little impression on the public: it found few purchasers, and made, it may be presumed, still fewer converts.

He soon after began a romance, which he never completed, from which his biographer has given copious extracts. It is conducted in the epistolary form, and, although exhibiting little of his subsequent power and passion, is recommended by a graceful and easy manner of narration, more attractive than the more elaborate and artificial style of his later novels.

This abortive attempt was succeeded, in 1798, by the publication of *Wieland*, the first of that remarkable series of fictions which flowed in such rapid succession from his pen in this and the three following years. In this romance, the author, deviating from the usual track of domestic or historic incident, proposed to delineate the powerful workings of passion, displayed by a mind constitutionally excitable, under the control of some terrible and mysterious agency. The scene is laid in Pennsylvania. The action takes place in a family by the name of Wieland, the principal member of which had inherited a melancholy and somewhat superstitious constitution of mind,

which his habitual reading and contemplation deepened into a calm but steady fanaticism. This temper is nourished still farther by the occurrence of certain inexplicable circumstances of ominous import. Strange voices are heard by different members of the family, sometimes warning them of danger, sometimes announcing events seeming beyond the reach of human knowledge. The still and solemn hours of night are disturbed by the unearthly summons. The other actors of the drama are thrown into strange perplexity, and an underplot of events is curiously entangled by the occurrence of unaccountable sights as well as sounds. By the heated fancy of Wieland they are referred to supernatural agency. A fearful destiny seems to preside over the scene, and to carry the actors onward to some awful catastrophe. At length the hour arrives. A solemn, mysterious voice announces to Wieland that he is now called on to testify his submission to the Divine will by the sacrifice of his earthly affections—to surrender up the affectionate partner of his bosom, on whom he had reposed all his hopes of happiness in this life. He obeys the mandate of Heaven. The stormy conflict of passion into which his mind is thrown, as the fearful sacrifice he is about to make calls up all the tender remembrances of conjugal fidelity and love, is painted with frightful strength of coloring. Although it presents, on the whole, as pertinent an example as we could offer from any of Brown's writings of the peculiar power and vividness of his conceptions, the whole scene is too long for insertion here. We will mutilate it, however, by a brief extract, as an illustration of our author's manner, more satisfactory than any criticism can be. Wieland, after receiving the fatal mandate, is represented in an apartment alone with his wife. His courage, or rather, his desperation, fails him, and he sends her, on some pretext, from the chamber. An interval, during which his insane passions have time to rally, ensues.

“She returned with a light; I led the way to

the chamber; she looked round her; she lifted the curtain of the bed; she saw nothing. At length she fixed inquiring eyes upon me. 'The light now enabled her to discover in my visage what darkness had hitherto concealed. Her cares were now transferred from my sister to myself, and she said, in a tremulous voice, 'Wieland! you are not well: what ails you? Can I do nothing for you?' That accents and looks so winning should disarm me of my resolution was to be expected. My thoughts were thrown anew into anarchy. I spread my hand before my eyes that I might not see her, and answered only by groans. She took my other hand between hers, and, pressing it to her heart, spoke with that voice which had ever swayed my will and wafted away sorrow. 'My friend! my soul's friend! tell me thy cause of grief. Do I not merit to partake with thee in thy cares? Am I not thy wife?'

"This was too much. I broke from her embrace, and retired to a corner of the room. In this pause, courage was once more infused into me. I resolved to execute my duty. She followed me, and renewed her passionate entreaty to know the cause of my distress.

"I raised my head and regarded her with steadfast looks. I muttered something about death: and the injunctions of my duty. At these words she shrunk back, and looked at me with a new expression of anguish. After a pause, she clasped her hands and exclaimed,

"'O Wieland! Wieland! God grant that I am mistaken; but surely something is wrong. I see it; it is too plain; thou art undone—lost to me and to thyself.' At the same time she gazed on my features with intensest anxiety, in hope that different symptoms would take place. I replied with vehemence, 'Undone! No; my duty is known, and I thank my God that my cowardice is now vanquished, and I have power to fulfil it. Catharine! I pity the weakness of nature; I pity thee, but must not spare. Thy life is claimed from my hands: thou must die!'

"Fear was now added to her grief. 'What mean you? Why talk you of death? Bethink yourself, Wieland; bethink yourself, and this fit will pass. O! why came I hither? Why did you drag me hither?'

"'I brought thee hither to fulfil a divine command. I am appointed thy destroyer, and destroy thee I must.' Saying this, I seized her wrists. She shrieked aloud, and endeavored to free herself from my grasp, but her efforts were vain.

"'Surely, surely, Wieland, thou dost not mean it. Am I not thy wife? and wouldst thou kill me? Thou wilt not; and yet—I see—thou art Wieland no longer! A fury, resistless and horrible, possesses thee: spare me—spare—help—help—'

"Till her breath was stopped she shrieked for help—for mercy. When she could speak no longer, her gestures, her looks appealed to my compassion. My accursed hand was irresolute and tremulous. I meant thy death to be sudden, thy struggles to be brief. Alas! my heart was infirm, my resolves mutable. Thrice I slackened my grasp, and life kept its hold, though in the midst of pangs. Her eyeballs started from their sockets. Grimness and distortion took place of all that used to bewitch me into transport and subdue me into reverence.

"I was commissioned to kill thee, but not to torment thee with the foresight of thy death; not to multiply thy fears and prolong thy agonies. Haggard, and pale, and lifeless, at length thou ceasedst to contend with thy destiny.

"This was a moment of triumph. Thus had I successfully subdued the stubbornness of human passions; the victim which had been demanded was given; the deed was done past recall.

"I lifted the corpse in my arms, and laid it on the bed. I gazed upon it with delight. Such was the elation of my thoughts that I even broke into laughter. I clapped my hands, and exclaimed, 'It is done! My sacred duty is fulfilled! To that I have sacrificed, O my God! thy last and best gift, my wife!'

“For a while I thus soared above frailty. I imagined I had set myself forever beyond the reach of selfishness, but my imaginations were false. This rapture quickly subsided. I looked again at my wife. My joyous ebullitions vanished, and I asked myself who it was whom I saw. Methought it could not be Catharine. It could not be the woman who had lodged for years in my heart; who had slept nightly in my bosom; who had borne in her womb, who had fostered at her breast, the beings who called me father; whom I had watched with delight, and cherished with a fondness ever new and perpetually growing: it could not be the same.

“Where was her bloom? These deadly and blood-suffused orbs but ill resemble the azure and ecstatic tenderness of her eyes. The lucid stream that meandered over that bosom, the glow of love that was wont to sit upon that cheek, are much unlike these livid stains and this hideous deformity. Alas! these were the traces of agony: the gripe of the assassin had been here!

“I will not dwell upon my lapse into desperate and outrageous sorrow. The breath of Heaven that sustained me was withdrawn, and I sunk into *mere man*. I leaped from the floor; I dashed my head against the wall; I uttered screams of horror; I panted after torment and pain. Eternal fire and the bickerings of hell, compared with what I felt, were music and a bed of roses.

“I thank my God that this degeneracy was transient—that he deigned once more to raise me aloft. I thought upon what I had done as a sacrifice to duty, and *was calm*. My wife was dead; but I reflected that, though this source of human consolation was closed, yet others were still open. If the transports of a husband were no more, the feelings of a father had still scope for exercise. When remembrance of their mother should excite too keen a pang, I would look upon them and *be comforted*.

“While I revolved these ideas, new warmth flowed in upon my heart. I was wrong. These

feelings were the growth of selfishness. Of this I was not aware; and, to dispel the mist that obscured my perceptions, a new effulgence and a new mandate were necessary.

"From these thoughts I was recalled by a ray that was shot into the room. A voice spake like that which I had before heard, 'Thou hast done well; but all is not done—the sacrifice is incomplete—thy children must be offered—they must perish with their mother!'"

This, too, is accomplished by the same remorseless arm, although the author has judiciously refrained from attempting to prolong the note of feeling, struck with so powerful a hand, by the recital of the particulars. The wretched fanatic is brought to trial for the murder, but is acquitted on the ground of insanity. The illusion which has bewildered him at length breaks on his understanding in its whole truth. He cannot sustain the shock, and the tragic tale closes with the suicide of the victim of superstition and imposture. The key to the whole of this mysterious agency which controls the circumstances of the story is—ventriloquism! ventriloquism exerted for the very purpose by a human fiend, from no motives of revenge or hatred, but pure diabolical malice, or, as he would make us believe, and the author seems willing to endorse this absurd version of it, as a mere practical joke! The reader, who has been gorged with this feast of horrors, is tempted to throw away the book in disgust at finding himself the dupe of such paltry jugglery; which, whatever sense be given to the term ventriloquism, is altogether incompetent to the various phenomena of sight and sound with which the story is so plentifully seasoned. We can feel the force of Dryden's imprecation, when he cursed the inventors of those fifth acts which are bound to unravel all the fine mesh of impossibilities which the author's wits had been so busy entangling in the four preceding.

The explication of the mysteries of Wieland naturally suggests the question how far an author is

bound to explain the *supernaturalities*, if we may so call them, of his fictions; and whether it is not better, on the whole, to trust to the willing superstition and credulity of the reader (of which there is perhaps store enough in almost every bosom, at the present enlightened day even, for poetical purposes) than to attempt a solution on purely natural or mechanical principles. It was thought no harm for the ancients to bring the use of *machinery* into their epics, and a similar freedom was conceded to the old English dramatists, whose ghosts and witches were placed in the much more perilous predicament of being subject to the scrutiny of the spectator, whose senses are not near so likely to be duped as the sensitive and excited imagination of the reader in his solitary chamber. It must be admitted, however, that the public of those days, when the

“Undoubting mind
Believed the magic wonders that were sung,”

were admirably seasoned for the action of superstition in all forms, and furnished, therefore, a most enviable audience for the melo-dramatic artist, whether dramatist or romance-writer. But all this is changed. No witches ride the air nowadays, and faries no longer “danced their rounds by the pale moonlight,” as the worthy Bishop Corbet, indeed, lamented a century and a half ago.

Still it may be allowed, perhaps, if the scene is laid in some remote age or country; to borrow the ancient superstitions of the place, and incorporate them into, or, at least, color the story with them, without shocking the wellbred prejudices of the modern reader. Sir Walter Scott has done this with good effect in more than one of his romances, as every one will readily call to mind. A fine example occurs in the Boden Glass apparition in Waverley, which the great novelist, far from attempting to explain on any philosophical principles, or even by an intimation of its being the mere creation of a feverish imagination, has left as he found it, trusting that the reader’s poetic feeling will readily accommodate itself to the pop-

ular superstitions of the country he is depicting. This reserve on his part, indeed, arising from a truly poetic view of the subject, and an honest reliance on a similar spirit in his reader, has laid him open, with some matter-of-fact people, to the imputation of not being wholly untouched himself by the national superstitions. Yet how much would the whole scene have lost in its permanent effect if the author had attempted an explanation of the apparition on the ground of an optical illusion not infrequent among the mountain mists of the Highlands, or any other of the ingenious solutions so readily at the command of the thoroughbred story-teller!

It must be acknowledged, however, that this way of solving the riddles of romance would hardly be admissible in a story drawn from familiar scenes and situations in modern life, and especially in our own country. The lights of education are flung too bright and broad over the land to allow any lurking-hole for the shadows of a twilight age. So much the worse for the poet and the novelist. Their province must now be confined to poor human nature, without meddling with the "Gorgons and chimeras dire" which floated through the bewildered brains of our forefathers, at least on the other side of the water. At any rate, if a writer, in this broad sunshine, ventures on any sort of *diablerie*, he is forced to explain it by all the thousand contrivances of trapdoors, secret passages, waxen images, and other makeshifts from the property-room of Mrs. Radcliffe and Company.

Brown, indeed, has resorted to a somewhat higher mode of elucidating his mysteries by a remarkable phenomenon of our nature. But the misfortune of all these attempts to account for the marvels of the story by natural or mechanical causes is, that they are very seldom satisfactory, or competent to their object. This is eminently the case with the ventriloquism in Wieland. Even where they are competent, it may be doubted whether the reader, who has suffered his credulous fancy to be entranced by the spell of the magician,

will be gratified to learn, at the end, by what cheap mechanical contrivance he has been duped. However this may be, it is certain that a very unfavorable effect, in another respect, is produced on his mind, after he is made acquainted with the nature of the secret spring by which the machinery is played, more especially when one leading circumstance, like ventriloquism in *Wieland*, is made the master-key, as it were, by which all the mysteries are to be unlocked and opened at once. With this explanation at hand, it is extremely difficult to rise to that sensation of mysterious awe and apprehension on which so much of the sublimity and general effect of the narrative necessarily depends. Instead of such feelings, the only ones which can enable us to do full justice to the author's conceptions, we sometimes, on the contrary, may detect a smile lurking in the corner of the mouth as we peruse scenes of positive power, from the contrast obviously suggested of the importance of the apparatus and the portentous character of the results. The critic, therefore, possessed of the real key to the mysteries of the story, if he would do justice to his author's merits, must divest himself, as it were, of his previous knowledge, by fastening his attention on the results, to the exclusion of the insignificant means by which they are achieved. He will not always find this an easy matter.

But to return from this rambling digression: in the following year, 1799, Brown published his second novel, entitled *Ormond*. The story presents few of the deeply agitating scenes and powerful bursts of passion which distinguish the first. It is designed to exhibit a model of surpassing excellence in a female rising superior to all the shocks of adversity, and the more perilous blandishments of seduction, and who, as the scene grows darker and darker around her, seems to illumine the whole with the radiance of her celestial virtues. The reader is reminded of the "patient Griselda," so delicately portrayed by the pencils of Boccaccio and Chaucer. It must be admitted, however, that

the contemplation of such a character in the abstract is more imposing than the minute details by which we attain to the knowledge of it; and although there is nothing, we are told, which the gods looked down upon with more satisfaction than a brave mind struggling with the storms of adversity, yet, when these come in the guise of poverty and all the train of teasing annoyances in domestic life, the tale, if long protracted, too often produces a sensation of weariness scarcely to be compensated by the moral grandeur of the spectacle.

The appearance of these two novels constitutes an epoch in the ornamental literature of America. They are the first decidedly successful attempts in the walk of romantic fiction. They are still farther remarkable as illustrating the character and state of society on this side of the Atlantic, instead of resorting to the exhausted springs of European invention. These circumstances, as well as the uncommon powers they displayed both of conception and execution, recommended them to the notice of the literary world, although their philosophical method of dissecting passion and analyzing motives of action placed them somewhat beyond the reach of vulgar popularity. Brown was sensible of the favorable impression which he had made, and mentions it in one of his epistles to his brother with his usual unaffected modesty: "I add somewhat, though not so much as I might if I were so inclined, to the number of my friends. I find to be the writer of *Wieland* and *Ormond* is a greater recommendation than I ever imagined it would be."

In the course of the same year, the quiet tenor of his life was interrupted by the visitation of that fearful pestilence, the yellow fever, which had for several successive years made its appearance in the city of New York, but which in 1798 fell upon it with a violence similar to that with which it had desolated Philadelphia in 1793. Brown had taken the precaution of withdrawing from the latter city, where he then resided, on its first appearance there.

He prolonged his stay in New York, however, relying on the healthiness of the quarter of the town where he lived, and the habitual abstemiousness of his diet. His friend Smith was necessarily detained there by the duties of his profession; and Brown, in answer to the reiterated importunities of his absent relatives to withdraw from the infected city, refused to do so, on the ground that his personal services might be required by the friends who remained in it; a disinterestedness well meriting the strength of attachment which he excited in the bosom of his companions.

Unhappily, Brown was right in his prognostics, and his services were too soon required in behalf of his friend Dr. Smith, who fell a victim to his own benevolence, having caught the fatal malady from an Italian gentleman, a stranger in the city, whom he received, when infected with the disease, into his house, relinquishing to him his own apartment. Brown had the melancholy satisfaction of performing the last sad offices of affection to his dying friend. He himself soon became affected with the same disorder; and it was not till after a severe illness that he so far recovered as to be able to transfer his residence to Perth Amboy, the abode of Mr. Dunlap, where a pure and invigorating atmosphere, aided by the kind attentions of his host, gradually restored him to a sufficient degree of health and spirits for the prosecution of his literary labors.

The spectacle he had witnessed made too deep an impression on him to be readily effaced, and he resolved to transfer his own conceptions of it, while yet fresh, to the page of fiction, or, as it might rather be called, of history, for the purpose, as he intimates in his preface, of imparting to others some of the fruits of the melancholy lesson he had himself experienced. Such was the origin of his next novel, *Arthur Mervyn; or, Memoirs of the Year 1793*. This was the fatal year of the yellow fever in Philadelphia. The action of the story is chiefly confined to that city, but seems to be prepared with little contrivance, on no regular or

systematic plan, consisting simply of a succession of incidents, having little cohesion except in reference to the hero, but affording situations of great interest, and frightful fidelity of coloring. The pestilence wasting a thriving and populous city has furnished a topic for more than one great master. It will be remembered as the terror of every schoolboy in the pages of Thucydides; it forms the gloomy portal to the light and airy fictions of Boccaccio; and it has furnished a subject for the graphic pencil of the English novelist De Foe, the only one of the three who never witnessed the horrors which he paints, but whose fictions wear an aspect of reality which history can rarely reach.

Brown has succeeded in giving the same terrible distinctness to his impressions by means of individual portraiture. He has, however, not confined himself to this, but, by a variety of touches, lays open to our view the whole interior of the city of the plague. Instead of expatiating on the loathsome symptoms and physical ravages of the disease, he selects the most striking moral circumstances which attend it; he dwells on the withering sensation that falls so heavily on the heart in the streets of the once busy and crowded city, now deserted and silent, save only where the wheels of the melancholy hearse are heard to rumble along the pavement. Our author not unfrequently succeeds in conveying more to the heart by the skillful selection of a single circumstance than would have flowed from a multitude of petty details. It is the art of the great masters of poetry and painting.

The same year in which Brown produced the first part of "Arthur Mervyn," he entered on the publication of a periodical entitled, *The Monthly Magazine and American Review*, a work that, during its brief existence, which terminated in the following year, afforded abundant evidence of its editor's versatility of talent and the ample range of his literary acquisitions. Our hero was now fairly in the traces of authorship. He looked to

it as his permanent vocation; and the indefatigable diligence with which he devoted himself to it may at least serve to show that he did not shrink from his professional engagements from any lack of industry or enterprise.

The publication of "Arthur Mervyn" was succeeded not long after by that of *Edgar Huntly; or, the Adventures of a Sleepwalker*, a romance presenting a greater variety of wild and picturesque adventure, with more copious delineations of natural scenery, than is to be found in his other fictions; circumstances, no doubt, possessing more attractions for the mass of readers than the peculiarities of his other novels. Indeed, the author has succeeded perfectly in constantly stimulating the curiosity by a succession of as original incidents, perils and hair-breadth escapes as ever flitted across a poet's fancy. It is no small triumph of the art to be able to maintain the curiosity of the reader unflagging through a succession of incidents, which, far from being sustained by one predominant passion, and forming parts of one whole, rely each for its interest on its own independent merits.

The story is laid in the western part of Pennsylvania, where the author has diversified his descriptions of a simple and almost primitive state of society with uncommonly animated sketches of rural scenery. It is worth observing how the somber complexion of Brown's imagination, which so deeply tinges his moral portraiture, sheds its gloom over his pictures of material nature, raising the landscape into all the severe and savage sublimity of a *Salvator Rosa*. The somnambulism of this novel, which, like the ventriloquism of "Wieland," is the moving principle of all the machinery, has this advantage over the latter, that it does not necessarily impair the effect by perpetually suggesting a solution of mysteries, and thus dispelling the illusion on whose existence the effect of the whole story mainly depends. The adventures, indeed, built upon it are not the most probable in the world; but, waiving this—we shall

be well rewarded for such concession—there is no farther difficulty.

The extract already cited by us from the first of our author's novels has furnished the reader with an illustration of his power in displaying the conflict of passion under high moral excitement. We will now venture another quotation from the work before us, in order to exhibit more fully his talent for the description of external objects.

Edgar Huntly, the hero of the story, is represented in one of the wild mountain fastnesses of Norwalk, a district in the western part of Pennsylvania. He is on the brink of a ravine, from which the only avenue lies over the body of a tree thrown across the chasm, through whose dark depths below a rushing torrent is heard to pour its waters.

“While occupied with these reflections, my eyes were fixed upon the opposite steeps. The tops of the trees, waving to and fro in the wildest commotion, and their trunks occasionally bending to the blast, which, in these lofty regions, blew with a violence unknown in the tracts below, exhibited an awful spectacle. At length my attention was attracted by the trunk which lay across the gulf, and which I had converted into a bridge. I perceived that it had already swerved somewhat from its original position; that every blast broke or loosened some of the fibers by which its roots were connected with the opposite bank; and that, if the storm did not speedily abate, there was imminent danger of its being torn from the rock and precipitated into the chasm. Thus my retreat would be cut off, and the evils from which I was endeavoring to rescue another would be experienced by myself.

“I believed my destiny to hang upon the expedition with which I should recross this gulf. The moments that were spent in these deliberations were critical, and I shuddered to observe that the trunk was held in its place by one or two fibers, which were already stretched almost to breaking.

“To pass along the trunk, rendered slippery by the wet and unsteadfast by the wind, was emin-

ently dangerous. To maintain my hold in passing in defiance of the whirlwind, required the most vigorous exertions. For this end, it was necessary to discommode myself of my cloak, and of the volume which I carried in the pocket of my coat.

“Just as I had disposed of these encumbrances, and had risen from my seat, my attention was again called to the opposite steep by the most unwelcome object that at this time could possibly occur. Something was perceived moving among the bushes and rocks, which, for a time, I hoped was nothing more than a raccoon or opossum, but which presently appeared to be a panther. His gray coat, extended claws, fiery eyes, and a cry which he that moment uttered, and which, by its resemblance to the human voice, is peculiarly terrific, denoted him to be the most ferocious and untameable of that detested race. The industry of our hunters has nearly banished animals of prey from these precincts. The fastnesses of Norwalk, however, could not but afford refuge to some of them. Of late I had met them so rarely that my fears were seldom alive, and I trod without caution the ruggedest and most solitary haunts. Still, however, I had seldom been unfurnished in my rambles with the means of defence.

“The unfrequency with which I had lately encountered this foe, and the encumbrance of provision, made me neglect, on this occasion, to bring with me my usual arms. The beast that was now before me, when stimulated by hunger, was accustomed to assail what ever could provide him with a banquet of blood. He would set upon the man and the deer with equal and irresistible ferocity. His sagacity was equal to his strength, and he seemed able to discover when his antagonist was armed and prepared for defence.

“My past experience enabled me to estimate the full extent of my danger. He sat on the brow of the steep, eyeing the bridge, and apparently deliberating whether he should cross it. It was

probable that he had scented my footsteps thus far, and, should he pass over, his vigilance could scarcely fail of detecting my asylum.

“Should he retain his present station, my danger was scarcely lessened. To pass over in the face of a famished tiger was only to rush upon my fate. The falling of the trunk, which had lately been so anxiously deprecated, was now, with no less solicitude, desired. Every new gust, I hoped, would tear asunder its remaining bands, and, by cutting off all communication between the opposite steeps, place me in security. My hopes, however, were destined to be frustrated. The fibers of the prostrate tree were obstinately tenacious of their hold, and presently the animal scrambled down the rock and proceeded to cross it.

“Of all kinds of death, that which now menaced me was the most abhorred. To die by disease or by the hand of a fellow-creature, was propitious and lenient in comparison with being rent to pieces by the fangs of this savage. To perish in this obscure retreat by means so impervious to the anxious curiosity of my friends, to lose my portion of existence by so untoward and ignoble a destiny, was insupportable. I bitterly deplored my rashness in coming hither unprovided for an encounter like this.

“The evil of my present circumstances consisted chiefly in suspense. My death was unavoidable, but my imagination had leisure to torment itself by anticipations. One foot of the savage was slowly and cautiously moved after the other. He struck his claws so deeply into the bark that they were with difficulty withdrawn. At length he leaped upon the ground. We were now separated by an interval of scarcely eight feet. To leave the spot where I crouched was imposssible. Behind and beside me the cliff rose perpendicularly, and before me was this grim and terrible visage. I shrunk still closer to the ground, and closed my eyes.

“From this pause of horror I was aroused by

the noise occasioned by a second spring of the animal. He leaped into the pit, in which I had so deeply regretted that I had not taken refuge, and disappeared. My rescue was so sudden, and so much beyond my belief or my hope, that I doubted for a moment whether my senses did not deceive me. This opportunity of escape was not to be neglected. I left my place and scrambled over the trunk with a precipitation which had like to have proved fatal. The tree groaned and shook under me, the wind blew with unexampled violence, and I had scarcely reached the opposite steep when the roots were severed from the rock, and the whole fell thundering to the bottom of the chasm.

“My trepidations were not speedily quieted. I looked back with wonder on my hair-breadth escape, and on that singular concurrence of events which had placed me in so short a period in absolute security. Had the trunk fallen a moment earlier, I should have been imprisoned on the hill or thrown headlong. Had its fall been delayed another moment, I should have been pursued; for the beast now issued from his den, and testified his surprise and disappointment by tokens the sight of which made my blood run cold.

“He saw me, and hastened to the verge of the chasm. He squatted on his hind legs, and assumed the attitude of one preparing to leap. My consternation was excited afresh by these appearances. It seemed at first as if the rift was too wide for any power of muscles to carry him in safety over; but I knew the unparalleled agility of this animal, and that his experience made him a better judge of the practicability of this exploit than I was.

“Still there was hope that he would relinquish this design as desperate. This hope was quickly at an end. He sprung, and his fore legs touched the verge of the rock on which I stood. In spite of vehement exertions, however, the surface was too smooth and too hard to allow him to make good his hold. He fell, and a piercing cry uttered

below showed that nothing had obstructed his descent to the bottom."

The subsequent narrative leads the hero through a variety of romantic adventures, especially with the savages, with whom he has several desperate rencounters and critical escapes. The track of adventure, indeed, strikes into the same wild solitudes of the forest that have since been so frequently traveled over by our ingenious countryman, Cooper. The light in which the character of the North American Indian has been exhibited by the two writers has little resemblance. Brown's sketches, it is true, are few and faint. As far as they go, however, they are confined to such views as are most conformable to the popular conceptions, bringing into full relief the rude and uncouth lineaments of the Indian character, its cunning, cruelty, and unmitigated ferocity, with no intimations of a more generous nature. Cooper, on the other hand, discards all the coarser elements of savage life, reserving those only of a picturesque and romantic cast, and elevating the souls of his warriors by such sentiments of courtesy, high-toned gallantry, and passionate tenderness as belong to the riper period of civilization. Thus idealized, the portrait, if not strictly that of the fierce and untamed son of the forest, is at least sufficiently true for poetical purposes. Cooper is indeed a poet. His descriptions of inanimate nature, no less than of savage man, are instinct with the breath of poetry. Witness his infinitely various pictures of the ocean; or still more, of the beautiful spirit that rides upon its bosom, the gallant ship, which under his touches becomes an animated thing, inspired by a living soul; reminding us of the beautiful superstition of the simple-hearted natives, who fancied the bark of Columbus some celestial visitant, descending on his broad pinions from the skies.

Brown is far less of a colorist. He deals less in external nature, but searches the depths of the soul. He may be rather called a philosophical than a poetical writer; for, though he has that

intensity of feeling which constitutes one of the distinguishing attributes of the latter, yet in his most tumultuous bursts of passion we frequently find him pausing to analyze and coolly speculate on the elements which have raised it. This intrusion, indeed, of reason; *la raison froide* into scenes of the greatest interest and emotion, has sometimes the unhappy effect of chilling them altogether.

In 1800 Brown published the second part of his *Arthur Mervyn*, whose occasional displays of energy and pathos by no means compensate the violent dislocations and general improbabilities of the narrative. Our author was led into these defects by the unpardonable precipitancy of his composition. Three of his romances were thrown off in the course of one year. These were written with the printer's devil literally at his elbow, one being begun before another was completed, and all of them before a regular, well-digested plan was devised for their execution.

The consequences of this curious style of doing business are such as might have been predicted. The incidents are strung together with about as little connection as the rhymes in "the House that Jack built;" and the whole reminds us of some bizarre, antiquated edifice, exhibiting a dozen styles of architecture, according to the caprice or convenience of its successive owners.

The reader is ever at a loss for a clew to guide him through the labyrinth of strange, incongruous incident. It would seem as if the great object of the author was to keep alive the state of suspense, on the player's principle, in the "Rehearsal," that "on the stage it is best to keep the audience in suspense; for to guess presently at the plot or the sense tires them at the end of the first act. Now here every line surprises you, and brings in new matter!" Perhaps, however, all this proceeds less from calculation than from the embarrassment which the novelist feels in attempting a solution of his own riddles, and which leads him to put off the reader, by multiplying incident after incident,

until at length, entangled in the complicated snarl of his own intrigue, he is finally obliged, when the fatal hour arrives, to cut the knot which he cannot unravel. There is no other way by which we can account for the forced and violent *dénouemens* which bring up so many of Brown's fictions. Voltaire has remarked, somewhere in his Commentaries on Corneille, that "an author may write with the rapidity of genius, but should correct with scrupulous deliberation." Our author seems to have thought it sufficient to comply with the first half of the maxim.

In 1801 Brown published his novel of *Clara Howard*, and in 1804 closed the series with *Jane Talbot*, first printed in England. They are composed in a more subdued tone, discarding those startling preternatural incidents of which he had made such free use in his former fictions. In the preface to his first romance, "Wieland," he remarks, in allusion to the mystery on which the story is made to depend, that "it is a sufficient vindication of the writer if history furnishes one parallel fact." But the French critic, who tells us *le vrai peut quelquefois n'être pas vraisemblable*, has, with more judgment, condemned this vicious recurrence to extravagant and improbable incident. Truth cannot always be pleaded in vindication of the author of a fiction any more than of a libel. Brown seems to have subsequently come into the same opinion; for, in a letter addressed to his brother James, after the publication of "Edgar Huntly," he observes, "Your remarks upon the gloominess and out-of-nature incidents of 'Huntly,' if they be not just in their full extent, are doubtless such as most readers will make, which alone is a sufficient reason for dropping the doleful tone and assuming a cheerful one, or, at least, substituting moral causes and daily incidents in place of the prodigious or the singular. I shall not fall hereafter into that strain." The two last novels of our author, however, although purified from the more glaring defects of the preceding, were so inferior in their general power and originality of

conception, that they never rose to the same level in public favor.

In the year 1801 Brown returned to his native city, Philadelphia, where he established his residence in the family of his brother. Here he continued, steadily pursuing his literary avocations; and in 1803 undertook the conduct of a periodical, entitled *The Literary Magazine and American Register*. A great change had taken place in his opinions on more than one important topic connected with human life and happiness, and, indeed, in his general tone of thinking, since abandoning his professional career. Brighter prospects, no doubt, suggested to him more cheerful considerations. Instead of a mere dreamer in the world of fancy, he had now become a practical man: larger experience and deeper meditation had shown him the emptiness of his Utopian theories; and, though his sensibilities were as ardent, and as easily enlisted as ever in the cause of humanity, his schemes of amelioration were built upon, not against, the existing institutions of society. The enunciation of the principles on which the periodical above alluded to was to be conducted, is so honorable every way to his heart and his understanding that we cannot refrain from making a brief extract from it.

“In an age like this, when the foundations of religion and morality have been so boldly attacked, it seems necessary, in announcing a work of this nature, to be particularly explicit as to the path which the editor means to pursue. He therefore avows himself to be, without equivocation or reserve, the ardent friend and the willing champion of the Christian religion. Christian piety he reveres as the highest excellence of human beings; and the amplest reward he can seek for his labor is the consciousness of having, in some degree, however inconsiderable, contributed to recommend the practice of religious duties. As in the conduct of this work a supreme regard will be paid to the interests of religion and morality, he will scrupulously guard against all that dishonors and impairs

that principle. Everything that savors of indelicacy or licentiousness will be rigorously proscribed. His poetical pieces may be dull, but they shall at least be free from voluptuousness or sensuality; and his prose, whether seconded or not by genius and knowledge, shall scrupulously aim at the promotion of public and private virtue."

During his abode in New York our author had formed an attachment to an amiable and accomplished young lady, Miss Elizabeth Linn, daughter of the excellent and highly-gifted Presbyterian divine, Dr. William Linn, of that city. Their mutual attachment, in which the impulses of the heart were sanctioned by the understanding, was followed by their marriage in November, 1804, after which he never again removed his residence from Philadelphia.

With the additional responsibilities of his new station, he pursued his literary labors with increased diligence. He projected the plan of an *Annual Register*, the first work of the kind in the country, and in 1806 edited the first volume of the publication, which was undertaken at the risk of an eminent bookseller of Philadelphia, Mr. Conrad, who had engaged his editorial labors in the conduct of the former Magazine, begun in 1803. When it is considered that both these periodicals were placed under the superintendence of one individual, and that he bestowed such indefatigable attention on them that they were not only prepared, but a large portion actually executed by his own hands, we shall form no mean opinion of the extent and variety of his stores of information and his facility in applying them. Both works are replete with evidences of the taste and erudition of their editor, embracing a wide range of miscellaneous articles, essays, literary criticism, and scientific researches. The historical portion of "The Register" in particular, comprehending in addition to the political annals of the principal states of Europe and of our own country, an elaborate inquiry into the origin and organization of our domestic institutions, displays a discrimination

in the selection of incidents, and a good faith and candor in the mode of discussing them, that entitle it to great authority as a record of contemporary transactions. Eight volumes were published of the first-mentioned periodical, and the latter was continued under his direction till the end of the fifth volume, 1809.

In addition to these regular, and, as they may be called, professional labors, he indulged his prolific pen in various speculations, both of a literary and political character, many of which appeared in the pages of the "Portfolio." Among other occasional productions, we may notice a beautiful biographical sketch of his wife's brother, Dr. J. B. Linn, pastor of the Presbyterian church in Philadelphia, whose lamented death occurred in the year succeeding Brown's marriage. We must not leave out of the account three elaborate and extended pamphlets, published between 1803 and 1809, on political topics of deep interest to the community at that time. The first of these, on the cession of Louisiana to the French, soon went into a second edition. They all excited general attention at the time of their appearance by the novelty of their arguments, the variety and copiousness of their information, the liberality of their views, the independence, so rare at that day, of foreign prejudices; the exemption, still rarer, from the bitterness of party spirit; and, lastly, the tone of loyal and heartfelt patriotism—a patriotism without cant—with which the author dwells on the expanding glory and prosperity of his country in a strain of prophecy that it is our boast has now become history.

Thus occupied, Brown's situation seemed now to afford him all the means for happiness attainable in this life. His own labors secured to him an honorable independence and a high reputation, which, to a mind devoted to professional or other intellectual pursuits, is usually of far higher estimation than gain. Round his own fireside he found ample scope for the exercise of his affectionate sensibilities, while the tranquil pleasures

of domestic life proved the best possible relaxation for a mind wearied by severe intellectual effort. His grateful heart was deeply sensible to the extent of his blessings; and in more than one letter he indulges in a vein of reflection which shows that his only solicitude was from the fear of their instability. His own health furnished too well-grounded cause for such apprehensions.

We have already noticed that he set out in life with a feeble constitution. His sedentary habits and intense application had not, as it may well be believed, contributed to repair the defects of Nature. He had for some time shown a disposition to pulmonary complaints, and had raised blood more than once, which he in vain endeavored to persuade himself did not proceed from the lungs. As the real character of the disease disclosed itself in a manner not to be mistaken, his anxious friends would have persuaded him to cross the water in the hope of re-establishing his health by a seasonable change of climate. But Brown could not endure the thoughts of so long a separation from his beloved family, and he trusted to the effect of a temporary abstinence from business, and of one of those excursions into the country by which he had so often recruited his health and spirits.

In the summer of 1806 he made a tour into New Jersey and New York. A letter addressed to one of his family from the banks of the Hudson, during this journey, exhibits in melancholy colors how large a portion of his life had been clouded by disease, which now, indeed, was too oppressive to admit of any other alleviation than what he could find in the bosom of his own family.

“MY DEAREST MARY—Instead of wandering about, and viewing more nearly a place that affords very pleasing landscapes, here am I, hovering over the images of wife, children, and sisters. I want to write to you and home; and though unable to procure paper enough to form a letter, I cannot help saying something even on this scrap.

“I am mortified to think how incurious and in-

active a mind has fallen to my lot. I left home with reluctance. If I had not brought a beloved part of my home along with me, I should probably have not left it at all. At a distance from home, my enjoyments, my affections are beside you. If swayed by mere inclination, I should not be out of your company a quarter of an hour between my parting and returning hour; but I have some mercy on you and Susan, and a due conviction of my want of power to beguile your vacant hour with amusement, or improve it by instruction. Even if I were ever so well, and if my spirits did not continually hover on the brink of dejection, my talk could only make you yawn; as things are, my company can only tend to create a gap indeed.

“When have I known that lightness and vivacity of mind which the divine flow of health, even in calamity, produces in some men, and would produce in me, no doubt—at least, when not soured by misfortune? Never; scarcely ever; not longer than half an hour at a time since I have called myself man, and not a moment since I left you.”

Finding these brief excursions productive of no salutary change in his health, he at length complied with the entreaties of his friends, and determined to try the effect of a voyage to Europe in the following spring. That spring he was doomed never to behold. About the middle of November he was taken with a violent pain in his left side, for which he was bled. From that time forward he was confined to his chamber. His malady was not attended with the exemption from actual pain with which Nature seems sometimes willing to compensate the sufferer for the length of its duration. His sufferings were incessant and acute; and they were supported, not only without a murmur, but with an appearance of cheerfulness, to which the hearts of his friends could but ill respond. He met the approach of Death in the true spirit of Christian philosophy. No other dread but that of separation from those dear to him on earth had power to disturb his tranquillity for a

moment. But the temper of his mind in his last hours is best disclosed in a communication from that faithful partner who contributed more than any other to support him through them. "He always felt for others more than for himself; and the evidences of sorrow in those around him, which could not at all times be suppressed, appeared to affect him more than his own sufferings. Whenever he spoke of the probability of a fatal termination to his disease, it was in an indirect and covert manner, as, 'you must do so and so when I am absent,' or 'when I am asleep.' He surrendered not up one faculty of his soul but with his last breath. He saw Death in every step of his approach, and viewed him as a messenger that brought with him no terrors. He frequently expressed his resignation; but his resignation was not produced by apathy or pain; for while he bowed with submission to the Divine will, he felt with the keenest sensibility his separation from those who made this world but too dear to him. Toward the last he spoke of death without disguise, and appeared to wish to prepare his friends for the event, which he felt to be approaching. A few days previous to his change, as sitting up in the bed, he fixed his eyes on the sky, and desired not to be spoken to until he first spoke. In this position, and with a serene countenance, he continued for some minutes, and then said to his wife, 'When I desired you not to speak to me, I had the most transporting and sublime feelings I have ever experienced; I wanted to enjoy them, and know how long they would last;' concluding with requesting her to remember the circumstance."

A visible change took place in him on the morning of the 19th of February, 1810, and he caused his family to be assembled around his bed, when he took leave of each one of them in the most tender and impressive manner. He lingered, however, a few days longer, remaining in the full possession of his faculties to the 22d of the month, when he expired without a struggle. He had reached the thirty-ninth year of his age the month

preceding his death. The family which he left consisted of a wife and four children.

There was nothing striking in Brown's personal appearance. His manners, however, were distinguished by a gentleness and unaffected simplicity which rendered them extremely agreeable. He possessed colloquial powers which do not always fall to the lot of the practised and ready writer. His rich and various acquisitions supplied an unfailing fund for the edification of his hearers. They did not lead him, however to affect an air of superiority, or to assume too prominent a part in the dialogue, especially in large or mixed company, where he was rather disposed to be silent, reserving the display of his powers for the unrestrained intercourse of friendship. He was a stranger not only to base and malignant passions, but to the paltry jealousies which sometimes sour the intercourse of men of letters. On the contrary, he was ever prompt to do ample justice to the merits of others. His heart was warm with the feeling of universal benevolence. Too sanguine and romantic views had exposed him to some miscalculations and consequent disappointments in youth, from which, however, he was subsequently retrieved by the strength of his understanding, which, combining with what may be called his natural elevation of soul, enabled him to settle the soundest principles for the regulation of his opinions and conduct in after life. His reading was careless and desultory, but his appetite was voracious; and the great amount of miscellaneous information which he thus amassed was all demanded to supply the outpourings of his mind in a thousand channels of entertainment and instruction. His unwearied application is attested by the large amount of his works, large even for the present day, when mind seems to have caught the accelerated movement so generally given to the operations of machinery. The whole number of Brown's printed works, comprehending his editorial as well as original productions, to the former of which his own pen con-

tributed a very disproportionate share, is not less than four-and-twenty printed volumes, not to mention various pamphlets, anonymous contributions to divers periodicals, as well as more than one compilation of laborious research which he left unfinished at his death.

Of this vast amount of matter, produced within the brief compass of little more than ten years, that portion on which his fame as an author must permanently rest is his novels. We have already entered too minutely into the merits of these productions to require anything farther than a few general observations. They may probably claim to be regarded as having first opened the way to the successful cultivation of romantic fiction in this country. Great doubts were long entertained of our capabilities for immediate success in this department. We had none of the buoyant, stirring associations, of a romantic age; none of the chivalrous pageantry, the feudal and border story, or Robin Hood adventure; none of the dim, shadowy superstitions, and the traditional legends, which had gathered like moss round every stone, hill, and valley of the olden countries. Everything here wore a spick-and-span new aspect, and lay in the broad, garish sunshine of every day life. We had none of the picturesque varieties of situation or costume; everything lay on the same dull, prosaic level; in short, we had none of the most obvious elements of poetry: at least so it appeared to the vulgar eye. It required the eye of genius to detect the rich stores of romantic and poetic interest that lay beneath the crust of society. Brown was aware of the capabilities of our country, and the poverty of the results he was less inclined to impute to the soil than to the cultivation of it; at least this would appear from some remarks dropped in his correspondence in 1794, several years before he broke ground in this field himself. "It used to be a favorite maxim with me, that the genius of a poet should be sacred to the glory of his country. How far this rule can be reduced to practice by an American bard, how

far he can prudently observe it, and what success has crowned the efforts of those who, in their compositions, have shown that they have not been unmindful of it, is perhaps not worth the inquiry.

“Does it not appear to you that, to give poetry a popular currency and universal reputation, a particular cast of manners and state of civilization is necessary? I have sometimes thought so, but perhaps it is an error; and the want of popular poems argues only the demerit of those who have already written, or some defect in their works, which unfits them for every taste or understanding.”

The success of our author's experiment, which was entirely devoted to American subjects, fully established the soundness of his opinions, which have been abundantly confirmed by the prolific pens of Irving, Cooper, Sedgwick, and other accomplished writers, who, in their diversified sketches of national character and scenery, have shown the full capacity of our country for all the purposes of fiction. Brown does not direct himself, like them, to the illustration of social life and character. He is little occupied with the exterior forms of society. He works in the depths of the heart, dwelling less on human action than the sources of it. He has been said to have formed himself on Goodwin. Indeed, he openly avowed his admiration of that eminent writer, and has certainly, in some respects, adopted his mode of operation, studying character with a philosophic rather than a poetic eye. But there is no servile imitation in all this. He has borrowed the same torch, indeed, to read the page of human nature, but the lesson he derives from it is totally different. His great object seems to be to exhibit the soul in scenes of extraordinary interest. For this purpose, striking and perilous situations are devised, or circumstances of strong moral excitement, a troubled conscience, partial gleams of insanity, or bodings of imaginary evil, which haunt the soul, and force it into all the agonies of terror. In the midst of the fearful strife, we are coolly

invited to investigate its causes and all the various phenomena which attend it; every contingency, probability, nay, possibility, however remote, is discussed and nicely balanced. The heat of the reader is seen too evaporate in this cold-blooded dissection, in which our author seems to rival Butler's hero, who,

“Profoundly skilled in analytic,
Could distinguish and divide
A hair 'twixt south and southwest side.”

We are constantly struck with the strange contrast of over-passion and over-reasoning. But perhaps, after all, these defects could not be pruned away from Brown's composition without detriment to his peculiar excellence. *Si non errâsset, fecerat ille minus*. If so, we may willingly pardon the one for the sake of the other.

We cannot close without adverting to our author's style. He bestowed great pains on the formation of it; but, in our opinion, without great success, at least in his novels. It has an elaborate, factitious air, contrasting singularly with the general simplicity of his taste and the careless rapidity of his composition. We are aware, indeed, that works of imagination may bear a higher flush of color, a poetical varnish, in short, that must be refused to graver and more studied narrative. No writer has been so felicitous in reaching the exact point of good taste in this particular as Scott, who, on a ground-work of prose, may be said to have enabled his readers to breathe an atmosphere of poetry. More than one author, on the other hand, as Florian, in French, for example, and Lady Morgan, in English, in their attempts to reach this middle region, are eternally fluttering on the wing of sentiment, equally removed from good prose and good poetry.

Brown, perhaps willing to avoid this extreme, has fallen into the opposite one, forcing his style into unnatural vigor and condensation. Unusual and pedantic epithets, and elliptical forms of expression, in perpetual violation of idiom, are resorted to at the expense of simplicity and nature.

He seems averse to telling simple things in a simple way. Thus, for example, we have such expressions as these: "I was *fraught with the persuasion* that my life was endangered." "The outer door was ajar. I shut it with trembling eagerness, and drew every bolt that *appended* to it." "His brain seemed to swell beyond its *continent*." "I waited till their slow and hoarser *inspirations* showed them to be both asleep. Just then, on changing my position, my head struck against some things which *depended* from the ceiling of the closet." "It was still dark, but my sleep was at an end, and by a common apparatus (tinder-box?) that lay beside my bed, I could instantly produce a light." "On recovering from *deliquium*, you found it where it had been dropped." It is unnecessary to multiply examples, which we should not have adverted to at all had not our opinions in this matter been at variance with those of more than one respectable critic. This sort of language is no doubt in very bad taste. It cannot be denied, however, that although these defects are sufficiently general to give a coloring to the whole of his composition, yet his works afford many passages of undeniable eloquence and rhetorical beauty. It must be remembered, too, that his novels were his first productions, thrown off with careless profusion, and exhibiting many of the defects of an immature mind, which longer experience and practice might have corrected. Indeed, his later writings are recommended by a more correct and natural phraseology, although it must be allowed that the graver topics to which they are devoted, if they did not authorize, would at least render less conspicuous any studied formality and artifice of expression.

These verbal blemishes, combined with defects already alluded to in the development of his plots, but which all relate to the form rather than the *fond* of his subject, have made our author less extensively popular than his extraordinary powers would have entitled him to be. His peculiar

merits, indeed, appeal to a higher order of criticism than is to be found in ordinary and superficial readers. Like the productions of Coleridge or Wordsworth, they seem to rely on deeper sensibilities than most men possess, and tax the reasoning powers more severely than is agreeable to readers who resort to works of fiction only as an epicurean indulgence. The number of their admirers is therefore necessarily more limited than that of writers of less talent, who have shown more tact in accommodating themselves to the tone of popular feeling or prejudice.

But we are unwilling to part, with anything like a tone of disparagement lingering on our lips, with the amiable author to whom our rising literature is under such large and various obligations; who first opened a view into the boundless fields of fiction, which subsequent adventurers have successfully explored; who has furnished so much for our instruction in the several departments of history and criticism, and has rendered still more effectual service by kindling in the bosom of the youthful scholar the same generous love of letters which glowed in his own; whose writings, in fine, have uniformly inculcated the pure and elevated morality exemplified in his life. The only thing we can regret is, that a life so useful should have been so short, if, indeed, that can be considered short which has done so much toward attaining life's great end.

CERVANTES.

FORMERLY, a nation, pent up within its own barriers, knew less of its neighbors than we now know of what is going on in Siam or Japan. A river, a chain of mountains, an imaginary line even, parted them as far asunder as if oceans had rolled between. To speak correctly, it was their imperfect civilization, their ignorance of the means and the subjects of communication which thus kept them asunder. Now, on the contrary, a change in the domestic institutions of one country can hardly be effected without a corresponding agitation in those of its neighbors. A treaty of alliance can scarcely be adjusted without the intervention of a general Congress. The sword cannot be unsheathed in one part of Christendom without thousands leaping from their scabbards in every other. The whole system is bound together by as nice sympathies as if animated by a common pulse, and the remotest countries of Europe are brought into contiguity as intimate as were in ancient times the provinces of a single monarchy.

This intimate association has been prodigiously increased of late years by the unprecedented discoveries which science has made for facilitating intercommunication. The inhabitant of Great Britain, that "ultima Thule" of the ancients, can now run down to the extremity of Italy in less time than it took Horace to go from Rome to Brundisium. A steamboat of fashionable tourists will touch at all the places of note in the Iliad and Odyssey in fewer weeks than it would have cost years to an ancient Argonaut, or a crusader of the Middle Ages. Every one, of course, travels, and almost every capital and noted watering-place on the Continent swarms with its thousands,

and Paris with its tens of thousands of itinerant Cockneys, many of whom, perhaps, have not wandered beyond the sound of Bowbells in their own little island.

Few of these adventurers are so dull as not to be quickened into something like curiosity respecting the language and institutions of the strange people among whom they are thrown, while the better sort and more intelligent are led to study more carefully the new forms, whether in arts or letters, under which human genius is unveiled to them.

The effect of all this is especially visible in the reforms introduced into the modern systems of education. In both the universities recently established in London, the apparatus for instruction, instead of being limited to the ancient tongues, is extended to the whole circle of modern literature; and the editorial labors of many of the professors show that they do not sleep on their posts. Periodicals, under the management of the ablest writers, furnish valuable contributions of foreign criticism and intelligence; and regular histories of the various Continental literatures, a department in which the English are singularly barren, are understood to be now in actual preparation.

But, although barren of literary, the English have made important contributions to the political history of the Continental nations. That of Spain has employed some of their best writers, who, it must be admitted, however, have confined themselves so far to the foreign relations of the country as to have left the domestic in comparative obscurity. Thus Robertson's great work is quite as much the history of Europe as of Spain under Charles the Fifth; and Watson's "Reign of Philip the Second" might with equal propriety be styled "The War of the Netherlands," which is its principal burden.

A few works recently published in the United States have shed far more light on the interior organization and intellectual culture of the Spanish nation. Such, for example, are the writings of

Irving, whose gorgeous coloring reflects so clearly the chivalrous splendors of the fifteenth century, and the travels of Lieutenant Slidell, presenting sketches equally animated of the social aspect of that most picturesque of all lands in the present century. In Mr. Cushing's "Reminiscences of Spain," we find, mingled with much characteristic fiction, some very laborious inquiries into curious and recondite points of history. In the purely literary department, Mr. Ticknor's beautiful lectures before the classes of Harvard University, still in manuscript, embrace a far more extensive range of criticism than is to be found in any Spanish work, and display, at the same time, a degree of thoroughness and research which the comparative paucity of materials will compel us to look for in vain in Bouterwek or Sismondi. Mr. Ticknor's successor, Professor Longfellow, favorably known by other compositions, has enriched our language with a noble version of the "Coplas de Manrique," the finest gem, beyond all comparison, in the Castilian verse of the fifteenth century. We have also read with pleasure a clever translation of Quevedo's "Visions," no very easy achievement, by Mr. Elliot, of Philadelphia, though the translator is wrong in supposing his the first English version. The first is as old as Queen Anne's time, and was made by the famous Sir Roger L'Estrange.

We propose, not to give the life of Cervantes, but to notice such points as are least familiar in his literary history, and especially in regard to the composition and publication of his great work, the *Don Quixote*; a work which, from its wide and long-established popularity, may be said to constitute part of the literature, not merely of Spain, but of every country in Europe.

The age of Cervantes was that of Philip the Second, when the Spanish monarchy, declining somewhat from its palmy state, was still making extraordinary efforts to maintain, and even to extend its already overgrown empire. Its navies were on every sea, and its armies in every quarter of the Old World and in the New. Arms was the

only profession worthy of a gentleman; and there was scarcely a writer of any eminence—certainly no bard—of the age, who, if he were not in orders, had not borne arms, at some period, in the service of his country. Cervantes, who, though poor, was born of an ancient family (it must go hard with a Castilian who cannot make out a pedigree for himself), had a full measure of this chivalrous spirit, and, during the first half of his life, we find him in the midst of all the stormy and disastrous scenes of the iron trade of war. His love of the military profession, even after the loss of his hand, or of the use of it, for it is uncertain which, is sufficient proof of his adventurous spirit. In the course of his checkered career he visited the principal countries in the Mediterranean, and passed five years in melancholy captivity at Algiers. The time was not lost, however, which furnished his keen eye with those glowing pictures of Moslem luxury and magnificence with which he has enriched his pages. After a life of unprecedented hardship, he returned to his own country, covered with laurels and scars, with very little money in his pocket, but with plenty of that experience which, regarding him as a novelist, might be considered his stock in trade.

The poet may draw from the depths of his own fancy; the scholar from his library; but the proper study of the dramatic writer, whether in verse or in prose, is man—man, as he exists in society. He who would faithfully depict human character cannot study it too nearly and variously. He must sit down, like Scott, by the fireside of the peasant, and listen to the “auld wife’s” tale; he must preside, with Fielding, at a petty justice Sessions, or share with some Squire Western in the glorious hazards of a foxhunt; he must, like Smollett and Cooper, study the mysteries of the deep, and mingle on the stormy element itself with the singular beings whose destinies he is to describe; or, like Cervantes, he must wander among other races and in other climes before his pencil can give those chameleon touches which reflect the shifting,

many-colored hues of actual life. He may, indeed, like Rousseau, if it were possible to imagine another Rousseau, turn his thoughts inward, and draw from the depths of his own soul; but he would see there only his own individual passions and prejudices, and the portraits he might sketch, however various in subordinate details, would be, in their characteristic features, only the reproduction of himself. He might, in short, be a poet, a philosopher, but not a painter of life and manners.

Cervantes had ample means for pursuing the study of human character, after his return to Spain, in the active life which engaged him in various parts of the country. In Andalusia he might have found the models of the sprightly wit and delicate irony with which he has seasoned his fictions; in Seville, in particular, he was brought in contact with the fry of small sharpers and pickpockets, who make so respectable a figure in his *picaresco* novels; and in La Mancha he not only found the geography of his Don Quixote, but that whimsical contrast of pride and poverty in the natives, which has furnished the outlines of many a broad caricature to the comic writers of Spain.

During all this while he had made himself known only by his pastoral fiction, the "Galatea," a beautiful specimen of an insipid class, which, with all its literary merits, afforded no scope for the power of depicting human character, which he possessed, perhaps, unknown to himself. He wrote, also, a good number of plays, all of which, except two, and these recovered only at the close of the last century, have perished. One of these, "The Siege of Numantia," displays that truth of drawing and strength of color which mark the consummate artist. It was not until he had reached his fifty-seventh year that he completed the First Part of his great work, the Don Quixote. The most celebrated novels, unlike most works of imagination, seem to have been the production of the later period of life. Fielding was between forty and fifty when he wrote "Tom Jones." Richard-

son was sixty, or very near it, when he wrote "Clarissa;" and Scott was some years over forty when he began the series of the Waverley novels.

The world, the school of the novelist, cannot be run through like the terms of a university, and the knowledge of its manifold varieties must be the result of long and diligent training.

The First Part of the Quixote was begun, as the author tells us, in a prison, to which he had been brought, not by crime or debt, but by some offence, probably, to the worthy people of La Mancha. It is not the only work of genius which has struggled into being in such unfavorable quarters. The "Pilgrim's Progress," the most popular, probably, of English fictions, was composed under similar circumstances. But we doubt if such brilliant fancies and such flashes of humor ever lighted up the walls of the prison-house before the time of Cervantes.

The First Part of the Don Quixote was given to the public in 1605. Carvantes, when the time arrived for launching his satire against the old, deep-rooted prejudices of his countrymen, probably regarded it, as well he might, as little less rash than his own hero's tilt against the windmills. He sought, accordingly, to shield himself under the cover of a powerful name, and asked leave to dedicate the book to a Castilian grandee, the Duke de Bejar. The duke, it is said, whether ignorant of the design, or doubting the success of the work, would have declined, but Cervantes urged him first to peruse a single chapter. The audience summoned to sit in judgment were so delighted with the first pages, that they would not abandon the novel till they had heard the whole of it. The duke, of course, without farther hesitation, condescended to allow his name to be inserted in this passport to immortality.

There is nothing very improbable in the story. It reminds one of a similar experiment by St. Pierre, who submitted his manuscript of "Paul and Virginia" to a circle of French *littérateurs*, Monsieur and Madame Necker, the Abbé Galiani,

Thomas, Buffon, and some others, all wits of the first water in the metropolis. Hear the result, in the words of his biographer, or, rather, his agreeable translator: "At first the author was heard in silence; by degrees the attention grew languid; they began to whisper, to gape, and listened no longer. M. de Buffon looked at his watch, and called for his horses; those near the door slipped out; Thomas went to sleep; M. Necker laughed to see the ladies weep; and the ladies, ashamed of their tears, did not dare to confess that they had been interested. The reading being finished, nothing was praised. Madame Necker alone criticised the conversation of Paul and the old man. This *moral* appeared to her tedious and commonplace; it broke the action, chilled the reader, and was a sort of *glass of iced water*. M. de St. Pierre retired in a state of indescribable depression. He regarded what had passed as his sentence of death. The effect of his work on an audience like that to which he had read it left him no hope for the future." Yet this work was "Paul and Virginia," one of the most popular books in the French language. So much for criticism!

The truth seems to be, that the judgment of no private circle, however well qualified by taste and talent, can afford a sure prognostic of that of the great public. If the manuscript to be criticised is our friend's, of course the verdict is made up before perusal. If some great man modestly sues for our approbation, our self-complacency has been too much flattered for us to withhold it. If it be a little man (and St. Pierre was but a little man at that time), our prejudices—the prejudices of poor human nature—will be very apt to take an opposite direction. Be the cause what it may, whoever rests his hopes of public favor on the smiles of a *coterie* runs the risk of finding himself very unpleasantly deceived. Many a trim bark which has flaunted gayly in a summer lake has gone to pieces amid the billows and breakers of the rude ocean.

The prognostic, in the case of Cervantes, however, proved more correct. His work produced

an instantaneous effect on the community. He had struck a note which found an echo in every bosom. Four editions were published in the course of the first year; two in Madrid, one in Valencia, and another at Lisbon.

This success, almost unexampled in any age, was still more extraordinary in one in which the reading public was comparatively limited. That the book found its way speedily into the very highest circles in the kingdom is evident from the well-known explanation of Philip the Third, when he saw a student laughing immoderately over some volume: "The man must be either out of his wits, or reading *Don Quixote*." Notwithstanding this, its author felt none of that sunshine of royal favor which would have been so grateful in his necessities.

The period was that of the golden prime of Castilian literature. But the monarch on the throne, one of the ill-starred dynasty of Austria, would have been better suited to the darkest of the Middle Ages. His hours, divided between his devotions and his debaucheries, left nothing to spare for letters; and his minister, the arrogant Duke of Lerma, was too much absorbed by his own selfish, though shallow schemes of policy, to trouble himself with romance writers, or their satirist. Cervantes, however, had entered on a career which, as he intimates in some of his verses, might lead to fame, but not to fortune. Happily, he did not compromise his fame by precipitating the execution of his works from motives of temporary profit. It was not till several years after the publication of the *Don Quixote* that he gave to the world his *Exemplary Novels*, as he called them; fictions which, differing from anything before known, not only in the Castilian, but, in some respects, in any other literature, gave ample scope to his dramatic talent, in the contrivance of situations, and the nice delineation of character. These works, whose diction was uncommonly rich and attractive, were popular from the first.

One cannot but be led to inquire why, with such

success as an author, he continued to be so straitened in his circumstances, as he plainly intimates was the case more than once in his writings. From the *Don Quixote*, notwithstanding its great run, he probably received little, since he had parted with the entire copyright before publication, when the work was regarded as an experiment, the result of which was quite doubtful. It is not so easy to explain the difficulty, when his success as an author had been so completely established. Cervantes intimates his dissatisfaction, in more than one place in his writings, with the booksellers themselves. "What, sir!" replies an author introduced into his *Don Quixote*, "would you have me sell the profit of my labor to a bookseller for three maravedis a sheet? for that is the most they will bid, nay, and expect, too, I should thank them for the offer." This burden of lamentation, the alleged illiberality of the publisher toward the poor author, is as old as the art of book-making itself. But the public receives the account from the party aggrieved only. If the bookseller reported his own case, we should, no doubt, have a different version. If Cervantes was in the right, the trade in Castile showed a degree of dexterity in their proceedings which richly entitled them to the pillory. In one of his tales, we find a certain licentiate complaining of "the tricks and deceptions they put upon an author when they buy a copyright from him; and still more, the manner in which they cheat him if he prints the book at his own charges; since nothing is more common than for them to agree for fifteen hundred, and have privily, perhaps, as many as three thousand thrown off, one half, at the least, of which they sell, not for his profit, but their own.

The writings of Cervantes appear to have gained him, however, two substantial friends in Cabra, the Count of Lemos, and the Archbishop of Toledo, of the ancient family of Rojas; and the patronage of these illustrious individuals has been nobly recompensed by having their names forever associated with the imperishable productions of genius.

There was still one kind of patronage wanting in this early age, that of a great enlightened community—the only patronage which can be received without some sense of degradation by a generous mind. There was, indeed, one golden channel of public favor, and that was the theater. The drama has usually flourished most at the period when a nation is beginning to taste the sweets of literary culture. Such was the early part of the seventeenth century in Europe; the age of Shakspeare, Jonson, and Fletcher in England; of Ariosto, Machiavelli, and the wits who first successfully wooed the comic muse of Italy; of the great Corneille, some years later, in France; and of that miracle, or rather, “monster of nature,” as Cervantes styled him, Lope de Vega, in Spain. Theatrical exhibitions are a combination of the material with the intellectual, at which the ordinary spectator derives less pleasure, probably, from the beautiful creations of the poet than from the scenic decorations, music, and other accessories which address themselves to the senses. The fondness for *spectacle* is characteristic of an early period of society, and the theater is the most brilliant of pageants. With the progress of education and refinement, men become less open to, or, at least, less dependant on the pleasures of sense, and seek their enjoyment in more elevated and purer sources. Thus it is that, instead of

“Sweating in the crowded theater, squeezed

And bored with elbow-points through both our sides,” as the sad minstrel of nature sings, we sit quietly at home, enjoying the pleasures of fiction around our own firesides, and the poem or the novel takes the place of the acted drama. The decline of dramatic writing may justly be lamented as that of one of the most beautiful varieties in the garden of literature. But it must be admitted to be both a symptom and a necessary consequence of the advance of civilization.

The popularity of the stage, at the period of which we are speaking, in Spain, was greatly augmented by the personal influence and reputation

of Lope de Vega, the idol of his countrymen, who threw off the various inventions of his genius with a rapidity and profusion that almost staggers credibility. It is impossible to state the result of his labors in any form that will not powerfully strike the imagination. Thus, he has left 21,300,000 verses in print, besides a mass of manuscript. He furnished the theater, according to the statement of his intimate friend Montalvan, with 1800 regular plays, and 400 *autos* or religious dramas—all acted. He composed, according to his own statement, more than 100 comedies in the almost incredible space of twenty-four hours each, and a comedy averaged between two and three thousand verses, great part of them rhymed and interspersed with sonnets and other more difficult forms of versification. He lived seventy-two years; and supposing him to have employed fifty of that period in composition, although he filled a variety of engrossing vocations during that time, he must have averaged a play a week, to say nothing of twenty-one volumes quarto of miscellaneous works, including five epics, written in his leisure moments, and all now in print!

The only achievements we can recall in literary history bearing any resemblance to, though falling far short of this, are those of our illustrious contemporary, Sir Walter Scott. The complete edition of his works, recently advertised by Murray, with the addition of two volumes, of which Murray has not the copyright, probably contains ninety volumes small octavo. To these should farther be added a large supply of matter for the Edinburgh Annual Register, as well as other anonymous contributions. Of these, forty-eight volumes of novels and twenty-one of history and biography were produced between 1814 and 1831, or in seventeen years. These would give an average of four volumes a year, or one for every three months during the whole of that period, to which must be added twenty-one volumes of poetry and prose previously published. The mere mechanical execution of so much work, both in his case

and Lope de Vega's, would seem to be scarce possible in the limits assigned. Scott, too was as variously occupied in other ways as his Spanish rival, and probably, from the social hospitality of his life, spent a much larger portion of his time in no literary occupation at all.

Notwithstanding we have amused ourselves, at the expense of the reader's patience perhaps, with these calculations, this certainly is not the standard by which we should recommend to estimate works of genius. Wit is not to be measured, like broadcloth, by the yard. Easy writing, as the adage says, and as we all know, is apt to be very hard reading. This brings to our recollection a conversation, in the presence of Captain Basil Hall, in which some allusion having been made to the astonishing amount of Scott's daily composition, the literary argonaut remarked, "There was nothing astonishing in all that, and that he did as much himself nearly every day before breakfast." Some one of the company unkindly asked "whether he thought the *quality* was the same." It is the quality, undoubtedly, which makes the difference. And in this view Lope de Vega's miracles lose much of their effect. Of all his multitudinous dramas, one or two only retain possession of the stage, and few, very few are now even read. His facility of composition was like that of an Italian improvisatore, whose fertile fancy easily clothes itself in verse, in a language the vowel terminations of which afford such a plentitude of rhymes. The Castilian presents even greater facilities for this than the Italian. Lope de Vega was an improvisatore.

With all his negligences and defects, however, Lope's interesting intrigues, easy, sprightly dialogue, infinite variety of inventions, and the breathless rapidity with which they followed one another, so dazzled and bewildered the imagination, that he completely controlled the public, and became, in the words of Cervantes, "sole monarch of the stage." The public repaid him with such substantial gratitude as has never been shown,

probably, to any other of its favorites. His fortune at one time, although he was careless of his expenses, amounted to one hundred thousand ducats, equal, probably, to between seven and eight hundred thousand dollars of the present day. In the same street in which dwelt this spoiled child of fortune, who, amid the caresses of the great, and the lavish smiles of the public, could complain that his merits were neglected, lived Cervantes, struggling under adversity, or at least earning a painful subsistence by the labors of his immortal pen. What a contrast do these pictures present to the imagination! If the suffrages of a *coterie*, as we have said, afford no warrant for those of the public, the example before us proves that the award of one's contemporaries is quite as likely to be set aside by posterity. Lope de Vega, who gave his name to his age, has now fallen into neglect even among his countrymen, while the fame of Cervantes, gathering strength with time, has become the pride of his own nation, as his works still continue to be the delight of the whole civilized world.

However stinted may have been the recompense of his deserts at home, it is gratifying to observe how widely his fame was diffused in his own lifetime, and that in foreign countries, at least, he enjoyed the full consideration to which he was entitled. An interesting anecdote illustrating this is recorded, which, as we have never seen it in English, we will lay before the reader. On occasion of a visit made by the Archbishop of Toledo to the French ambassador, resident at Madrid, the prelate's suite fell into conversation with the attendants of the Minister, in the course of which Cervantes was mentioned. The French gentlemen expressed their unqualified admiration of his writings, specifying the *Galatea*, *Don Quixote*, and the *Novels*, which, they said, were read in all the countries round, and in France particularly, where there were some who might be said to know them actually by heart. They intimated their desire to become personally ac-

quainted with so eminent a man, and asked many questions respecting his present occupations, his circumstances, and way of life. To all this the Castilians could only reply that he had borne arms in the service of his country, and was now old and poor. "What!" exclaimed one of the strangers, "is Señor Cervantes not in good circumstances? Why is he not maintained, then, out of the public treasury?" "Heaven forbid," rejoined another, "that his necessities should be ever relieved, if it is those which make him write, since it is his poverty that makes the world rich."

There are other evidences, though not of so pleasing a character, of the eminence which he had reached at home in the jealousy and ill-will of his brother poets. The Castilian poets of that day seem to have possessed a full measure of that irritability which has been laid at the door of all their tribe since the days of Horace; and the freedom of Cervantes's literary criticisms, in his *Don Quixote* and other writings, though never personal in their character, brought down on his head a storm of arrows, some of which, if not sent with much force, were, at least, well steeped in venom. Lope de Vega is even said to have appeared among the assailants, and a sonnet, still preserved, is currently imputed to him, in which, after much eulogy on himself, he predicts that the works of his rival will find their way into the kennel. But the author of this bad prophecy and worse poetry could never have been the great Lope, who showed, on all occasions, a generous spirit, and whose literary success must have made such an assault unnecessary, and in the highest degree unmanly. On the contrary, we have evidence of a very different feeling in the homage which he renders to the merits of his illustrious contemporary, in more than one passage of his acknowledged works, especially in his "*Laurel de Apolo*," in which he concludes his poetical panegyric with the following touching conceit:

"Porque se diga que una mano herida,
Pudo dar á su dueño eterna vida."

This poem was published by Lope in 1630, fourteen years after the death of his rival; notwithstanding, Mr. Lockhart informs his readers, in his biographical preface to the *Don Quixote*, that "as Lope de Vega was dead (1615), there was no one to divide with Cervantes the literary empire of his country."

In the dedication of his ill-fated comedies, 1615 (for Cervantes, like most other celebrated novelists, found it difficult to concentrate his expansive vein within the compass of dramatic rules), the public was informed that "*Don Quixote* was already booted," and preparing for another sally. It may seem strange that the author, considering the great popularity of his hero, had not sent him on his adventures before. But he had probably regarded them as already terminated; and he had good reasons to do so, since every incident in the First Part, as it has been styled only since the publication of the Second, is complete in itself, and the Don, although not actually killed on the stage, is noticed as dead, and his epitaph transcribed for the reader. However this may be, the immediate execution of his purpose, so long delayed, was precipitated by an event equally unwelcome and unexpected. This was the continuation of his work by another hand.

The author's name, his *nom de guerre*, was Avellaneda, a native of Tordesillas. Adopting the original idea of Cervantes, he goes forward with the same characters, through similar scenes of comic extravagance, in the course of which he perpetrates sundry plagiarisms from the First Part, and has some incidents so much resembling those in the Second Part, already written by Cervantes, that it has been supposed he must have had access to his manuscript. It is more probable, as the resemblance is but general, that he obtained his knowledge through hints, which may have fallen in conversation, from Cervantes, in the progress of his own work. The spurious continuation had some little merit, and attracted, probably, some interest, as any work conducted under

so popular a name could not have failed to do. It was, however, on the whole, a vulgar performance, thickly sprinkled with such gross scurrility and indecency, as was too strong even for the palate of that not very fastidious age. The public feeling may be gathered from the fact that the author did not dare to depart from his incognito, and claim the honors of a triumph. The most diligent inquiries have established nothing farther than that he was an Aragonese, judging from his diction, and from the complexion of certain passages in the work probably an ecclesiastic, and one of the swarm of small dramatists who felt themselves rudely handled by the criticism of Cervantes. The work was subsequently translated, or rather paraphrased, by Le Sage, who has more than once given a substantial value to gems of little price in Castilian literature by the brilliancy of his setting.

The original work of Avellaneda, always deriving an interest from the circumstances of its production, has been reprinted in the present century, and is not difficult to be met with. To have thus coolly invaded an author's own property, to have filched from him the splendid, though unfinished creations of his genius, before his own face, and while, as was publicly known, he was in the very process of completing them, must be admitted to be an act of unblushing effrontery not surpassed in the annals of literature. Cervantes was much annoyed, it appears, by the circumstance. The continuation of Avellaneda reached him, probably, when on the fifty-ninth chapter of the Second Part. At least, from that time he begins to discharge his gall on the head of the offender, who, it should be added, had consummated his impudence by sneering, in his introduction, at the qualifications of Cervantes. The best retort of the latter, however, was the publication of his own book, which followed at the close of 1615.

The English novelist, Richardson, experienced a treatment not unlike that of the Castilian. His popular story of Pamela was continued by another

and very inferior hand, under the title of "Pamela in High Life."

The circumstance prompted Richardson to undertake the continuation himself; and it turned out, like most others, a decided failure. Indeed, a skillful continuation seems to be the most difficult work of art. The first effort of the author breaks, as it were, unexpectedly on the public, taking their judgments by surprise, and by its very success creating a standard by which the author himself is subsequently to be tried. Before, he was compared with others; he is now to be compared with himself. The public expectation has been raised. A degree of excellence, which might have found favor at first, will now scarcely be tolerated. It will not even suffice for him to maintain his own level. He must rise above himself. The reader, in the mean while, has naturally filled up the blank, and insensibly conducted the characters and the story to a termination in his own way. As the reality seldom keeps pace with the ideal, the author's execution will hardly come up to the imagination of his readers; at any rate, it will differ from them, and so far be displeasing. We experience something of this disappointment in the dramas borrowed from popular novels, where the development of the characters by the dramatic author, and the new direction given to the original story in his hands, rarely fail to offend the taste and preconceived ideas of the spectator. To feel the force of this, it is only necessary to see the *Guy Mannering*, *Rob Roy*, and other plays dramatized from the *Waverley* novels.

Some part of the failure of such continuations is, no doubt, fairly chargeable, in most instances, on the author himself, who goes to his new task with little of his primitive buoyancy and vigor. He no longer feels the same interest in his own labors, which, losing their freshness, have become as familiar to his imagination as a thrice-told tale. The new composition has, of course, a different complexion from the former, cold, stiff, and disjointed, like a bronze statue, whose parts have

been separately put together, instead of being cast in one mould when the whole metal was in a state of fusion.

The continuation of Cervantes forms a splendid exception to the general rule. The popularity of his First Part had drawn forth abundance of criticism, and he availed himself of it to correct some material blemishes in the design of the Second, while an assiduous culture of the Castilian enabled him to enrich his style with greater variety and beauty.

He had now reached the zenith of his fame, and the profits of his continuation may have relieved the pecuniary embarrassments under which he had struggled. But he was not long to enjoy his triumph. Before his death, which took place in the following year, he completed his romance of "Persiles and Sigismunda," the dedication to which, written a few days before his death, is strongly characteristic of its writer. It is addressed to his old patron, the Conde de Lemos, then absent from the country. After saying, in the words of the old Spanish proverb, that he had "*one foot in the stirrup*," in allusion to the distant journey on which he was soon to set out, he adds, "Yesterday I received the extreme unction; but, now that the shadows of death are closing around me, I still cling to life, from the love of it, as well from the desire to behold you again. But if it is decreed otherwise (and the will of Heaven be done), your excellency will at least feel assured there was one person whose wish to serve you was greater than the love of life itself." After these reminiscences of his benefactor, he expresses his own purpose, should life be spared, to complete several works he had already begun. Such were the last words of this illustrious man; breathing the same generous sensibility, the same ardent love of letters and beautiful serenity of temper which distinguished him through life. He died a few days after, on the 23d of April, 1616. His remains were laid, without funeral pomp, in the monastery of the Holy Trinity at Madrid. No memorial

points out the spot to the eye of the traveler, nor is it known at this day. And, while many a costly construction has been piled on the ashes of the little great, to the shame of Spain be it spoken, no monument has yet been erected in honor of the greatest genius she has produced. He has built, however, a monument for himself more durable than brass or sculptured marble.

Don Quixote is too familiar to the reader to require any analysis; but we will enlarge on a few circumstances attending its composition but little known to the English scholar, which may enable him to form a better judgment for himself. The age of chivalry, as depicted in romances, could never, of course, have had any real existence; but the sentiments which are described as animating that age have been found more or less operative in different countries and different periods of society. In Spain, especially, this influence is to be discerned from a very early date. Its inhabitants may be said to have lived in a romantic atmosphere, in which all the extravagances of chivalry were nourished by their peculiar situation. Their hostile relations with the Moslem kept alive the full glow of religious and patriotic feeling. Their history is one interminable crusade. An enemy always on the borders, invited perpetual displays of personal daring and adventure. The refinement and magnificence of the Spanish Arabs throw a luster over these contests, such as could not be reflected from the rude skirmishes with their Christian neighbors. Lofty sentiments, embellished by the softer refinements of courtesy, were blended in the martial bosom of the Spaniard, and Spain became emphatically the land of romantic chivalry.

The very laws themselves, conceived in this spirit, contributed greatly to foster it. The ancient code of Alfonso the Tenth, in the thirteenth century, after many minute regulations for the deportment of the good knight, enjoins on him to "invoke the name of his mistress in the fight, that it may infuse new ardor into his soul, and preserve him from the commission of unknighly actions."

Such laws were not a dead letter. The history of Spain shows that the sentiment of romantic gallantry penetrated the nation more deeply, and continued longer than in any other quarter of Christendom.

Foreign chroniclers, as well as domestic, of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, notice the frequent appearance of Spanish knights in different courts of Europe, whither they had traveled, in the language of an old writer, "to seek honor and reverence" by their feats of arms. In the Paston Letters, written in the time of Henry the Sixth of England, we find a notice of a Castilian knight who presented himself before the court, and, with his mistress's favor around his arm, challenged the English cavaliers "to run a course of sharp spears with him for his sovereign lady's sake." Pulgar, a Spanish chronicler of the close of the sixteenth century, speaks of this roving knight-errantry as a thing of familiar occurrence among the young cavaliers of his day; and Oviedo, who lived somewhat later, notices the necessity under which every true knight found himself, of being in love, or *feigning to be so*, in order to give a suitable luster and incentive to his achievements. But the most singular proof of the extravagant pitch to which these romantic feelings were carried in Spain occurs in the account of the jousts appended to the fine old chronicle of Alvaro de Luna, published by the Academy in 1784. The principal champion was named Sueño de Quenones, who, with nine companions in arms, defended a pass at Orbigo, not far from the shrine of Compostella, against all comers, in the presence of King John the Second and his court. The object of this passage of arms, as it was called, was to release the knight from the obligation imposed on him by his mistress, of publicly wearing an iron collar round his neck every Thursday. The jousts continued for thirty days, and the doughty champions fought without shield or target, with weapons bearing points of Milan steel. Six hundred and twenty-seven encounters took place, and one hundred and sixty-six lances

were broken, when the emprise was declared to be fairly achieved. The whole affair is narrated with becoming gravity by an eye-witness, and the reader may fancy himself perusing the adventures of a Launcelot or an Amadis. The particulars of this tourney are detailed at length in Mills's Chivalry (vol. ii., chap. v.), where, however, the author has defrauded the successful champions of their full honors by incorrectly reporting the number of lances broken as only sixty-six.

The taste for these romantic extravagances naturally fostered a corresponding taste for the perusal of tales of chivalry. Indeed, they acted reciprocally on each other. These chimerical legends had once, also, beguiled the long evenings of our Norman ancestors; but, in the progress of civilization, had gradually given way to other and more natural forms of composition. They still maintained their ground in Italy, whither they had passed later, and where they were consecrated by the hand of genius. But Italy was not the true soil of chivalry, and the inimitable fictions of Bojardo, Pulci, and Ariosto were composed with that lurking smile of half-suppressed mirth which, far from a serious tone, could raise only a corresponding smile of incredulity in the reader.

In Spain, however, the marvels of romance were all taken in perfect good faith. Not that they were received as literally true; but the reader surrendered himself up to the illusion, and was moved to admiration by the recital of deeds which, viewed in any other light than as a wild frolic of imagination, would be supremely ridiculous; for these tales had not the merit of a seductive style and melodious versification to relieve them. They were, for the most part, an ill-digested mass of incongruities, in which there was as little keeping and probability in the characters as in the incidents, while the whole was told in that stilted "Hercles' vein," and with that licentiousness of allusion and imagery which could not fail to debauch both the taste and the morals of the youthful reader. The mind, familiarized with these monstrous, over-colored

pictures, lost all relish for the chaste and sober productions of art. The love of the gigantic and the marvellous indisposed the reader for the simple delineations of truth in real history. The feelings expressed by a sensible Spaniard of the sixteenth century, the anonymous author of the "*Dialogo de las Lenguas*," probably represent those of many of his contemporaries. "Ten of the best years of my life," says he, "were spent no more profitably than in devouring these lies, which I did even while eating my meals; and the consequence of this depraved appetite was, that if I took in hand any true book of history, or one that passed for such, I was unable to wade through it."

The influence of this meretricious taste was nearly as fatal on the historian himself as on his readers, since he felt compelled to minister to the public appetite such a mixture of the marvellous in all his narrations as materially discredited the veracity of his writings. Every hero became a demigod, who put the labors of Hercules to shame; and every monk or old hermit was converted into a saint, who wrought more miracles, before and after death, than would have sufficed to canonize a monastery. The fabulous ages of Greece are scarcely more fabulous than the close of the Middle Ages in Spanish history, which compares very discreditably, in this particular, with similar periods in most European countries. The confusion of fact and fiction continues to a very late age; and as one gropes his way through the twilight of tradition, he is at a loss whether the dim objects are men or shadows. The most splendid names in Castilian annals—names incorporated with the glorious achievements of the land, and embalmed alike in the page of the chronicler and the song of the minstrel—names associated with the most stirring, patriotic recollections—are now found to have been the mere coinage of fancy. There seems to be no more reason for believing in the real existence of Bernardo del Carpio, of whom so much has been said and sung, than in that of Charlemagne's paladins, or of the Knights of the Round Table. Even the Cid, the

national hero of Spain, is contended, by some of the shrewdest native critics of our own times, to be an imaginary being; and it is certain that the splendid fabric of his exploits, familiar as household words to every Spaniard, has crumbled to pieces under the rude touch of modern criticism. These heroes, it is true, flourished before the introduction of romances of chivalry; but the legends of their prowess have been multiplied beyond bounds, in consequence of the taste created by these romances, and an easy faith accorded to them at the same time, such as would never have been conceded in any other civilized nation. In short, the elements of truth and falsehood became so blended, that history was converted into romance, and romance received the credit due only to history.

These mischievous consequences drew down the animadversions of thinking men, and at length provoked the interference of government itself. In 1543, Charles the Fifth, by an edict, prohibited books of chivalry from being imported into his American colonies, or being printed, or even read there. The legislation for America proceeded from the crown alone, which had always regarded the New World as its own exclusive property. In 1555, however, the Cortes of the kingdom presented a *petition* (which requires only the royal signature to become at once the law), setting forth the manifold evils resulting from these romances. There is an air at once both of simplicity and solemnity in the language of this instrument which may amuse the reader: "Moreover, we say that it is very notorious what mischief has been done to young men and maidens, and other persons, by the persual of books full of lies and vanities, like Amadis, and works of that description, since young people especially, from their natural idleness, resort to this kind of reading, and, becoming enamored of passages of love or arms, or other nonsense which they find set forth therein, when situations at all analogous offer, are led to act much more extravagantly than they otherwise would

have done. And many times the daughter, when her mother has locked her up safely at home, amuses herself with reading these books, which do her more hurt than she would have received from going abroad. All which redounds, not only to the dishonor of individuals, but to the great detriment of conscience, by diverting the affections from holy, true, and Christian doctrine, to those wicked vanities with which the wits, as we have intimated, are completely bewildered. To remedy this, we entreat your majesty that no book treating of such matters be henceforth permitted to be read, that those now printed be collected and burned, and that none be published hereafter without special license; by which measures your majesty will render great service to God as well as to these kingdoms," etc., etc.

Notwithstanding this emphatic expression of public disapprobation, these enticing works maintained their popularity. The Emperor Charles, unmindful of his own interdict, took great satisfaction in their perusal. The royal *fêtes* frequently commemorated the fabulous exploits of chivalry, and Philip the Second, then a young man, appeared in these spectacles in the character of an adventurous knight-errant. Moratin enumerates more than seventy bulky romances, all produced in the sixteenth century, some of which passed through several editions, while many more works of the kind have, doubtless, escaped his researches. The last on his catalogue was printed in 1602, and was composed by one of the nobles at the court. Such was the state of things when Cervantes gave to the world the First Part of his *Don Quixote*; and it was against prejudices which had so long bade defiance to public opinion and the law itself that he now aimed the delicate shafts of his irony. It was a perilous emprise.

To effect his end, he did not produce a mere humorous travesty, like several of the Italian poets, who, having selected some well-known character in romance, make him fall into such low dialogue and such gross buffoonery as contrast most

ridiculously with his assumed name; for this, though a very good jest in its way, was but a jest, and Cervantes wanted the biting edge of satire. He was, besides, too much of a poet—was too deeply penetrated with the true spirit of chivalry not to respect the noble qualities which were the basis of it. He shows this in the *auto da fé* of the Don's library, where he spares the Amadis de Gaula and some others, the best of their kind. He had once himself, as he tells us, actually commenced a serious tale of chivalry.

Cervantes brought forward a personage, therefore, in whom were embodied all those generous virtues which belong to chivalry: disinterestedness, contempt of danger, unblemished honor, knightly courtesy, and those aspirations after ideal excellence which, if empty dreams, are the dreams of a magnanimous spirit. They are, indeed, represented by Cervantes as too ethereal for this world, and are successively dispelled as they come in contact with the coarse realities of life. It is this view of the subject which has led Sismondi, among other critics, to consider that the principal end of the author was "the ridicule of enthusiasm—the contrast of the heroic with the vulgar," and he sees something profoundly sad in the conclusions to which it leads. This sort of criticism appears to be over-refined. It resembles the efforts of some commentators to allegorize the great epics of Homer and Virgil, throwing a disagreeable mistiness over the story by converting mere shadows into substances, and substances into shadows.

The great purpose of Cervantes was, doubtless, that expressly avowed by himself, namely, to correct the popular taste for romances of chivalry. It is unnecessary to look for any other in so plain a tale, although, it is true, the conduct of the story produces impressions on the reader, to a certain extent, like those suggested by Sismondi. The melancholy tendency, however, is, in a great degree, counteracted by the exquisitely ludicrous character of the incidents. Perhaps, after all, if we are to hunt for a moral as the key of the fic-

tion, we may with more reason pronounce it to be the necessity of proportioning our undertakings to our capacities.

The mind of the hero, Don Quixote, is an ideal world, into which Cervantes has poured all the rich stores of his own imagination, the poet's golden dreams, high romantic exploit, and the sweet visions of pastoral happiness; the gorgeous chimeras of the fancied age of chivalry, which had so long entranced the world; splendid illusions, which, floating before us like the airy bubbles which the child throws off from his pipe, reflect, in a thousand variegated tints, the rude objects around, until, brought into collision with these, they are dashed in pieces, and melt into air. These splendid images derive tenfold beauty from the rich, antique coloring of the author's language, skillfully imitated from the old romances, but which necessarily escapes in the translation into a foreign tongue. Don Quixote's insanity operates both in mistaking the ideal for the real, and the real for the ideal. Whatever he has found in romances, he believes to exist in the world; and he converts all he meets with in the world into the visions of his romances. It is difficult to say which of the two produces the most ludicrous results.

For the better exposure of these mad fancies, Cervantes has not only put them into action in real life, but contrasted them with another character which may be said to form the reverse side of his hero's. Honest Sancho represents the material principle as perfectly as his master does the intellectual or ideal. He is of the earth, earthy. Sly, selfish, sensual, his dreams are not of glory, but of good feeding. His only concern is for his carcass. His notions of honor appear to be much the same with those of his jovial contemporary, Falstaff, as conveyed in his memorable soliloquy. In the sublime night-piece which ends with the fulling-mills—truly sublime until we reach the *dénouement*—Sancho asks his master, "Why need you go about this adventure? It is

main dark, and there is never a living soul sees us; we have nothing to do but to sheer off and get out of harm's way. Who is there to take notice of our flinching?" Can anything be imagined more exquisitely opposed to the true spirit of chivalry? The whole compass of fiction nowhere displays the power of contrast so forcibly as in these two characters: perfectly opposed to each other, not only in their minds and general habits, but in the minutest details of personal appearance.

It was a great effort of art for Cervantes to maintain the dignity of his hero's character in the midst of the whimsical and ridiculous distresses in which he has perpetually involved him. His infirmity leads us to distinguish between his character and his conduct, and to absolve him from all responsibility for the latter. The author's art is no less shown in regard to the other principal figure in the piece, Sancho Panza, who, with the most contemptible qualities, contrives to keep a strong hold on our interest by the kindness of his nature and his shrewd understanding. He is far too shrewd a person, indeed, to make it natural for him to have followed so crack-brained a master unless bribed by the promise of a substantial recompense. He is a personification, as it were, of the popular wisdom—a "bundle of proverbs," as his master somewhere styles him; and proverbs are the most compact form in which the wisdom of a people is digested. They have been collected into several distinct works in Spain, where they exceed in number those of any other, if not every other, country in Europe. As many of them are of great antiquity, they are of inestimable price with the Castilian purist, as affording rich samples of obsolete idioms and the various mutations of the language.

The subordinate portraits in the romance, though not wrought with the same care, are admirable studies of national character. In this view, the *Don Quixote* may be said to form an epoch in the history of letters, as the original of that kind of composition, the *Novel of Character*,

which is one of the distinguishing peculiarities of modern literature. When well executed, this sort of writing rises to the dignity of history itself, and may be said to perform no insignificant part of the functions of the latter. History describes men less as they are than as they appear, as they are playing a part on the great political theater—men in masquerade. It rests on state documents, which too often cloak real purposes under an artful veil of policy, or on the accounts of contemporaries blinded by passion or interest. Even without these deductions, the revolution of states, their wars, and their intrigues do not present the only aspect, nor, perhaps, the most interesting under which human nature can be studied. It is man in his domestic relations, around his own fireside, where alone his real character can be truly disclosed; in his ordinary occupations in society, whether for purposes of profit or of pleasure; in his every-day manner of living, his tastes and opinions, as drawn out in social intercourse; it is, in short, under all those forms which make up the interior of society that man is to be studied, if we would get the true form and pressure of the age—if, in short, we would obtain clear and correct ideas of the actual progress of civilization.

But these topics do not fall within the scope of the historian. He cannot find authentic materials for them. They belong to the novelist, who, indeed, contrives his incidents and creates his characters, but who, if true to his art, animates them with the same tastes, sentiments, and motives of action which belong to the period of his fiction. His portrait is not the less true because no individual has sat for it. He has seized the physiognomy of the times. Who is there that does not derive a more distinct idea of the state of society and manners in Scotland from the Waverly novels than from the best of its historians? of the condition of the Middle Ages, from the single romance of *Ivanhoe*, than from the volumes of Hume or Hallam? In like manner, the pencil of Cervantes has given a far more distinct

and a richer portraiture of life in Spain in the sixteenth century than can be gathered from a library of monkish chronicles.

Spain, which furnished the first good model of this kind of writing, seems to have possessed more ample materials for it than any other country except England. This is perhaps owing, in a great degree, to the freedom and originality of the popular character. It is the country where the lower classes make the nearest approach, in their conversation, to what is called humor. Many of the national proverbs are seasoned with it, as well as the *picaresco* tales, the indigenous growth of the soil, where, however, the humor runs rather too much to mere practical jokes. The free expansion of the popular characteristics may be traced, in part, to the freedom of the political institutions of the country before the iron hand of the Austrian dynasty was laid on it. The long wars with the Moslem invaders called every peasant into the field, and gave him a degree of personal consideration. In some of the provinces, as Catalonia, the democratic spirit frequently rose to an uncontrollable height. In this free atmosphere the rich and peculiar traits of national character were unfolded. The territorial divisions which marked the Peninsula, broken up anciently into a number of petty and independent states, gave, moreover, great variety to the national portraiture. The rude Austrian, the haughty and indolent Castilian, the industrious Aragonese, the independent Catalan, the jealous and wily Andalusian, the effeminate Valencian, and magnificent Granadine, furnished an infinite variety of character and costume for the study of the artist. The intermixture of Asiatic races, to an extent unknown in any other European land, was favorable to the same result. The Jews and the Moors were settled in too great numbers, and for too many centuries, in the land, not to have left traces of their Oriental civilization. The best blood of the country has flowed from what the modern Spaniard—the Spaniard of the Inquisition—regards as impure sources; and a work, popular

in the Peninsula, under the name of *Tizon de España* or "Brand of Spain," maliciously traces back the pedigrees of the noblest houses in the kingdom to a Jewish or Morisco origin. All these circumstances have conspired to give a highly poetic interest to the character of the Spaniards; to make them, in fact, the most picturesque of European nations, affording richer and far more various subjects for the novelist than other nations whose peculiarities have been kept down by the weight of a despotic government, or the artificial and levelling laws of fashion.

There is one other point of view in which the *Don Quixote* presents itself, that of its didactic import. It is not merely moral in its general tendency, though this was a rare virtue in the age in which it was written, but is replete with admonition and criticism, oftentimes requiring great boldness, as well as originality, in the author. Such, for instance, are the derision of witchcraft, and other superstitions common to the Spaniards; the ridicule of torture, which though not used in the ordinary courts, was familiar to the Inquisition; the frequent strictures on various departments and productions of literature. The literary criticism scattered throughout the work shows a profound acquaintance with the true principles of taste far before his time; and which has left his judgments of the writings of his countrymen still of paramount authority. In truth, the great scope of his work was didactic, for it was a satire against the false taste of his age. And never was there a satire so completely successful. The last romance of chivalry, before the appearance of the *Don Quixote*, came out in 1602. It was the last that was ever published in Spain. So completely was this kind of writing, which had bade defiance to every serious effort, now extinguished by the breath of ridicule,

"That soft and summer breath, whose subtle power

Passes the strength of storms in their most desolate hour."

It was impossible for any new author to gain an audience. The public had seen how the thunder

was fabricated. The spectator had been behind the scenes, and witnessed of what cheap materials kings and queens were made. It was impossible for him, by any stretch of imagination, to convert the tinsel and painted baubles which he had seen there into diadems and scepters. The illusion had fled forever.

Satire seldom survives the local or temporary interests against which it is directed. It loses its life with its sting. The satire of Cervantes is an exception. The objects at which it was aimed have long since ceased to interest. The modern reader is attracted to the book simply by its execution as a work of art, and, from want of previous knowledge, comprehends few of the allusions which gave such infinite zest to the perusal in its own day. Yet, under all these disadvantages, it not only maintains its popularity, but is far more widely extended, and enjoys far higher consideration, than in the life of its author. Such are the triumphs of genius!

Cervantes correctly appreciated his own work. He more than once predicted its popularity. "I will lay a wager," says Sancho, "that before long there will not be a chophouse, tavern, or barber's stall but will have a painting of our achievements." The honest squire's prediction was verified in his own day; and the author might have seen paintings of his work on wood and on canvas, as well as copper-plate engravings of it. Besides several editions of it at home, it was printed, in his own time, in Portugal, Flanders, and Italy. Since that period it has passed into numberless editions both in Spain and other countries. It has been translated into nearly every European tongue over and over again; into English ten times, into French eight, and others less frequently. We will close the present notice with a brief view of some of the principal editions, together with that at the head of our article.

The currency of the romance among all classes frequently invited its publication by incompetent hands; and the consequence was a plentiful crop

of errors, until the original text was nearly despoiled of its beauty, while some passages were omitted, and foreign ones still more shamefully interpolated. The first attempt to retrieve the original from these harpies, who thus foully violated it, singularly enough, was made in England. Queen Caroline, the wife of George the Second, had formed a collection of books of romance, which she playfully named the "library of the sage Merlin." The romance of Cervantes alone was wanting; and a nobleman, Lord Carteret, undertook to provide her with a suitable copy at his own expense. This was the origin of the celebrated edition published by Tonson, in London, 1738, 4 tom. 4to. It contained the Life of the Author, written for it by the learned Mayans y Siscar. It was the first biography (which merits the name) of Cervantes; and it shows into what oblivion his personal history had already fallen, that no less than seven towns claimed each the honor of giving him birth. The fate of Cervantes resembled that of Homer.

The example thus set by foreigners excited an honorable emulation at home; and at length, in 1780, a magnificent edition, from the far-famed press of Ibarra, was published at Madrid, in 4 tom. 4to, under the auspices of the Royal Spanish Academy; which, unlike many other literary bodies of sounding name, has contributed most essentially to the advancement of letters, not merely by original memoirs, but by learned and very beautiful editions of ancient writers. Its *Don Quixote* exhibits a most careful revision of the text, collated from the several copies printed in the author's lifetime, and supposed to have received his own emendations. There is too good reason to believe that these corrections were made with a careless hand; at all events, there is a plentiful harvest of typographical blunders in these primitive editions.

Prefixed to the publication of the Academy is the Life of Cervantes, by Rios, written with uncommon elegance, and containing nearly all that is of much interest in his personal history. A co-

pious analysis of the romance follows, in which a parallel is closely elaborated between it and the poems of Homer. But the romantic and the classical differ too widely from each other to admit of such an approximation; and the method of proceeding necessarily involves its author in infinite absurdities, which show an entire ignorance of the true principles of philosophical criticism, and which he would scarcely have fallen into had he given heed to the maxims of Cervantes himself.

In the following year, 1781, there appeared another edition in England deserving of particular notice. It was prepared by the Rev. Mr. Bowle, a clergyman at Idemestone, who was so enamored of the romance of Cervantes, that, after collecting a library of such works as could any way illustrate his author, he spent fourteen years in preparing a suitable commentary on him. There was ample scope for such a commentary. Many of the satirical allusions of the romance were misunderstood, as we have said, owing to ignorance of the books of chivalry at which they were aimed. Many incidents and usages, familiar to the age of Cervantes, had long since fallen into oblivion; and much of the idiomatic phraseology had grown to be obsolete, and required explanation. Cervantes himself had fallen into some egregious blunders, which in his subsequent revision of the work he had neglected to set right. The reader will readily call to mind the confusion as to Sancho's Dapple, who appears and disappears, most unaccountably, on the scene, according as the author happens to remember or forget that he was stolen. He afterward corrected this in two or three instances, but left three or four others unheeded. To the same account must be charged numberless gross anachronisms. Indeed, the whole Second Part is an anachronism, since the author introduces his hero criticising his First Part, in which his own epitaph is recorded.

Cervantes seems to have had a great distaste for the work of revision. Some of his blunders he laid at the printer's door, and others he dismissed

with the remark, more ingenious than true, that they were like moles, which, though blemishes in themselves, add to the beauty of the countenance. He little dreamed that his lapses were to be watched so narrowly, that a catalogue was actually to be set down of all his repetitions and inconsistencies, and that each of his hero's sallies was to be adjusted by an accurate chronological table like any real history. He would have been still slower to believe that in the middle of the eighteenth century a learned society, the Academy of Literature and Fine Arts at Troyes, in Champagne, should have chosen a deputation of their body to visit Spain and examine the library of the Escorial, in order to obtain, if possible, the original MS. of that Arabian sage from whom Cervantes professed to have translated his romance. This was to be more mad than Don Quixote himself; yet this actually happened.

Bowle's edition was printed in six volumes quarto; the two last contained notes, illustrations, and index, *all, as well as the text, in Castilian*. Watt, in his laborious "*Bibliotheca Britannica*," remarks, that the book did not come up to the public expectation. If so, the public must have been very unreasonable. It was a marvellous achievement for a foreigner. It was the first attempt at a commentary on the Quixote, and, although doubtless exhibiting inaccuracies which a native might have escaped, has been a rich mine of illustration, from which native critics have helped themselves most liberally, and sometimes with scanty acknowledgment.

The example of the English critic led to similar labors in Spain, among the most successful of which may be mentioned the edition by Pellicer, which has commended itself to every scholar by its very learned disquisitions on many topics both of history and criticism. It also contains a valuable memoir of Cervantes, whose life has since been written in a manner which leaves nothing farther to be desired, by Navarrete, well known by his laborious publication of documents relative to

the early Spanish discoveries. His biography of the novelist comprehends all the information, direct and subsidiary, which can now be brought together for the elucidation of his personal or literary history. If Cervantes, like his great contemporary, Skakspeare, has left few authentic details of his existence, the deficiency has been diligently supplied in both cases by speculation and conjecture.

There was still wanting a classical commentary on the *Quixote* devoted to the literary execution of the work. Such a commentary has at length appeared from the pen of Clemencin, the accomplished secretary of the Spanish Academy of History, who had acquired a high reputation for himself by the publication of the sixth volume of its memoirs, the exclusive work of his own hand. In his edition of the romance, besides illuminating with rare learning many of the obscure points in the narrative, he has accompanied the text with a severe but enlightened criticism, which, while it boldly exposes occasional offences against taste or grammar, directs the eye to those latent beauties which might escape a rapid or an ordinary reader. We much doubt if any Castilian classic has been so ably illustrated. Unfortunately, the First Part only was completed by the commentator, who died very recently. It will not be easy to find a critic equally qualified by his taste and erudition for the completion of the work.

The English, as we have noticed, have evinced their relish for Cervantes, not only by their critical labors, but by repeated translations. Some of these are executed with much skill, considering the difficulty of correctly rendering the idiomatic phraseology of humorous dialogue. The most popular versions are those of Motteux, Jarvis, and Smollett. Perhaps the first is the best of all. It was by a Frenchman, who came over to England in the time of James the Second. It betrays nothing of its foreign parentage, however, while its rich and racy diction and its quaint turns of expression are admirably suited to convey a lively

and very faithful image of the original. The slight tinge of antiquity which belongs to the time is not displeasing, and comports well with the tone of knightly dignity which distinguishes the hero. Lockhart's notes and poetical versions of old Castilian ballads, appended to the recent edition of Motteux, have rendered it by far the most desirable translation. It is singular that the first classical edition of Don Quixote, the first commentary, and probably the best foreign translation, should have been all produced in England; and farther, that the English commentator should have written in Spanish, and the English translation have been written by a Frenchman.

SIR WALTER SCOTT.*

THERE is no kind of writing, which has truth and instruction for its main object, so interesting and popular, on the whole, as biography. History, in its larger sense, has to deal with masses, which, while they divide the attention by the dazzling variety of objects, from their very generality are scarcely capable of touching the heart. The great objects on which it is employed have little relation to the daily occupations with which the reader is most intimate. A nation, like a corporation, seems to have no soul, and its checkered vicissitudes may be contemplated rather with curiosity for the lessons they convey than with personal sympathy. How different are the feelings excited by the fortunes, of an individual—one of the mighty mass, who in the page of history is swept along the current unnoticed and unknown! Instead of a mere abstraction, at once we see a being like ourselves, “fed with the same food, hurt with the same weapons, subject to the same diseases, healed by the same means, warmed and cooled by the same winter and summer” as we are. We place ourselves in his position, and see the passing current of events with the same eyes. We become a party to all his little schemes, share in his triumphs, or mourn with him in the disappointment of defeat. His friends become our friends. We learn to take an interest in their characters from their relation to him. As they pass away from the stage one after another, and as the clouds of

* 1. “Memoirs of the Life of Sir Walter Scott, Bart., by J. G. Lockhart. Five vols. 12mo. Boston: Otis, Brothers, & Co., 1837.”

2. “Recollections of Sir Walter Scott, Bart., 16mo. London: James Fraser, 1837.”

misfortune, perhaps, or of disease, settle around the evening of his own day, we feel the same sadness that steals over us on a retrospect of earlier and happier hours. And when at last we have followed him to the tomb, we close the volume, and feel that we have turned over another chapter in the history of life.

On the same principles, probably, we are more moved by the exhibition of those characters whose days have been passed in the ordinary routine of domestic and social life than by those most intimately connected with the great public events of their age. What, indeed, is the history of such men but that of the times? The life of Wellington or of Bonaparte is the story of the wars and revolutions of Europe. But that of Cowper, gliding away in the seclusion of rural solitude, reflects all those domestic joys, and, alas! more than the sorrows, which gather around every man's fireside and his heart. In this way the story of the humblest individual, faithfully recorded, becomes an object of lively interest. How much is that interest increased in the case of a man like Scott, who, from his own fireside, has sent forth a voice to cheer and delight millions of his fellow-men; whose life was passed within the narrow circle of his own village, as it were, but who, nevertheless, has called up more shapes and fantasies within that magic circle, acted more extraordinary parts, and afforded more marvels for the imagination to feed on, than can be furnished by the most nimble-footed, nimble-tongued traveler, from Marco Polo down to Mrs. Trollope, and that literary Sinbad, Captain Hall.

Fortunate as Sir Walter Scott was in his life, it is not the least of his good fortunes that he left the task of recording it to one so competent as Mr. Lockhart, who, to a familiarity with the person and habits of his illustrious subject, unites such entire sympathy with his pursuits, and such fine tact and discrimination in arranging the materials for their illustration. We have seen it objected that the biographer has somewhat transcended his

lawful limits in occasionally exposing what a nice tenderness for the reputation of Scott should have led him to conceal; but, on reflection, we are not inclined to adopt these views. It is difficult to prescribe any precise rule by which the biographer should be guided in exhibiting the peculiarities, and, still more, the defects of his subject. He should, doubtless, be slow to draw from obscurity those matters which are of a strictly personal and private nature, particularly when they have no material bearing on the character of the individual. But whatever the latter has done, said, or written to others can rarely be made to come within this rule. A swell of panegyric, where everything is in broad sunshine, without the relief of a shadow to contrast it, is out of nature, and must bring discredit on the whole. Nor is it much better when a sort of twilight mystification is spread over a man's actions, until, as in the case of all biographies of Cowper previous to that of Southey, we are completely bewildered respecting the real motives of conduct. If ever there was a character above the necessity of any management of this sort, it was Scott's; and we cannot but think that the frank exposition of the minor blemishes which sully it, by securing the confidence of the reader in the general fidelity of the portraiture, and thus disposing him to receive, without distrust, those favorable statements in his history which might seem incredible, as they certainly are unprecedented, is, on the whole, advantageous to his reputation. As regards the moral effect on the reader, we may apply Scott's own argument for not always recompensing suffering virtue, at the close of his fictions, with temporal prosperity—that such an arrangement would convey no moral to the heart whatever, since a glance at the great picture of life would show that virtue is not always thus rewarded.

In regard to the literary execution of Mr. Lockhart's work, the public voice has long since pronounced on it. A prying criticism may discern a few of those contraband epithets and slipshod sen-

tences, more excusable in *young* "Peter's Letters to his Kinsfolk," where, indeed, they are thickly sown, than in the production of a grave Aristarch of British criticism. But this is small game, where every reader of the least taste and sensibility must find so much to applaud. It is enough to say, that in passing from the letters of Scott, with which the work is enriched, to the text of the biographer, we find none of those chilling transitions which occur on the like occasions in more bungling productions; as, for example, in that recent one in which the unfortunate Hannah More is done to death by her friend Roberts. On the contrary, we are sensible only to a new variety of beauty in the style of composition. The correspondence is illumined by all that is needed to make it intelligible to a stranger, and selected with such discernment as to produce the clearest impression of the character of its author. The mass of interesting details is conveyed in language richly colored with poetic sentiment, and, at the same time, without a tinge of that mysticism which, as Scott himself truly remarked, "will never do for a writer of fiction, no, nor of history, nor moral essays, nor sermons;" but which, nevertheless, finds more or less favor in our own community, at the present day, in each and all of these.

The second work which we have placed at the head of this article, and from which the last remark of Sir Walter's was borrowed, is a series of notices originally published in "Fraser's Magazine," but now collected, with considerable additions, into a separate volume. Its author, Mr. Robert Pierce Gillies, is a gentleman of the Scotch bar, favorably known by translation from the German. The work conveys a lively report of several scenes and events, which, before the appearance of Lockhart's book, were of more interest and importance than they can now be, lost, as they are, in the flood of light which is poured on us from that source. In the absence of the sixth and last volume, however, Mr. Gillies may help us to a few particulars respecting the closing years of Sir Walter's life,

that may have some novelty—we know not how much to be relied on—for the reader. In the present notice of a work so familiar to most persons, we shall confine ourselves to some of those circumstances which contribute to form, or have an obvious connection with, his literary character.

Walter Scott was born at Edinburgh, August 15th, 1771. The character of his father, a respectable member of that class of attorneys who in Scotland are called Writers to the Signet, is best conveyed to the reader by saying that he sat for the portrait of Mr. Saunders Fairford in “Redgauntlet.” His mother was a woman of taste and imagination, and had an obvious influence in guiding those of her son. His ancestors, by both father’s and mother’s side, were of “gentle blood,” a position which, placed between the highest and the lower ranks in society, was extremely favorable, as affording facilities for communication with both. A lameness in his infancy—a most fortunate lameness for the world, if, as Scott says, it spoiled a soldier—and a delicate constitution, made it expedient to try the efficacy of country air and diet, and he was placed under the roof of his paternal grandfather at Sandy-Knowe, a few miles distant from the capital. Here his days were passed in the open fields, “with no other fellowship,” as he says, “than that of the sheep and lambs;” and here, in the lap of Nature,

“Meet nurse for a poetic child,”

his infant vision was greeted with those rude, romantic scenes which his own verses have since hallowed for the pilgrims from every clime. In the long evenings, his imagination, as he grew older, was warmed by traditionary legends of border heroism and adventure, repeated by the aged relative, who had herself witnessed the last gleams of border chivalry. His memory was one of the first powers of his mind which exhibited an extraordinary development. One of the longest of these old ballads, in particular, stuck so close to it, and he repeated it with such stentorian vociferation,

as to draw from the minister of a neighboring kirk the testy exclamation, "One may as well speak in the mouth of a cannon as where that child is."

On his removal to Edinburgh, in his eighth year, he was subjected to different influences. His worthy father was a severe martinet in all the forms of his profession, and, it may be added, of his religion, which he contrived to make somewhat burdensome to his more volatile son. The tutor was still more strict in his religious sentiments, and the lightest literary diversion in which either of them indulged was such as could be gleamed from the time-honored folios of Archbishop Spottiswoode or worthy Robert Wodrow. Even here, however, Scott's young mind contrived to gather materials and impulses for future action. In his long arguments with Master Mitchell, he became steeped in the history of the Covenanters and the persecuted Church of Scotland, while he was still more rooted in his own Jacobite notions, early instilled into his mind by the tales of his relatives of Sandy-Knowe, whose own family had been out in the "affair of forty-five." Amid the professional and polemical worthies of his father's library, Scott detected a copy of Shakspeare, and he relates with what *goût* he used to creep out of his bed, where he had been safely deposited for the night, and, by the light of the fire, *in puris naturalibus*, pore over the pages of the great magician, and study those mighty spells by which he gave to airy fantasies the forms and substance of humanity. Scott distinctly recollected the time and the spot where he first opened a volume of Percy's "Reliques of English Poetry;" a work which may have suggested to him the plan and the purpose of the "Border Minstrelsy." Every day's experience shows how much more actively the business of education goes on out of school than in it; and Scott's history shows equally that genius, whatever obstacles may be thrown in its way in one direction, will find room for its expansion in another, as the young

tree sends forth its shoots most prolific in that quarter where the sunshine is permitted to fall on it.

At the High School, in which he was placed by his father at an early period, he seems not to have been particularly distinguished in the regular course of studies. His voracious appetite for books, however, of a certain cast, as romances, chivalrous tales, and worm-eaten chronicles scarcely less chivalrous, and his wonderful memory for such reading as struck his fancy, soon made him regarded by his fellows as a phenomenon of black-letter scholarship, which, in process of time, achieved for him the cognomen of that redoubtable schoolman, Duns Scotus. He now also gave evidence of his powers of creation as well as of acquisition. He became noted for his own stories, generally bordering on the marvellous, with a plentiful seasoning of knight-errantry, which suited his bold and chivalrous temper. "Slink over beside me, Jamie," he would whisper to his schoolfellow Ballantyne, "and I'll tell you a story." Jamie was, indeed, destined to sit beside him during the greater part of his life.

The same tastes and talents continued to display themselves more strongly with increasing years. Having beaten pretty thoroughly the ground of romantic and legendary lore, at least so far as the English libraries to which he had access would permit, he next endeavored, while at the University, to which he had been transferred from the High School, to pursue the same subject in the Continental languages. Many were the strolls which he took in the neighborhood, especially to Arthur's Seat and Salisbury Crags, where, perched on some almost inaccessible eyrie, he might be seen conning over his Ariosto or Cervantes, or some other bard of romance, with some favorite companion of his studies, or pouring into the ears of the latter his own boyish legends glowing with

"achievements high,
And circumstance of chivalry."

A critical knowledge of these languages he seems

not to have obtained, and even in the French made but an indifferent figure in conversation. An accurate acquaintance with the pronunciation and prosody of a foreign tongue is undoubtedly a desirable accomplishment; but it is, after all, a mere accomplishment subordinate to the great purposes for which a language is to be learned. Scott did not, as is too often the case, mistake the shell for the kernel. He looked on language only as the key to unlock the foreign stores of wisdom, the pearls of inestimable price, wherever found, with which to enrich his native literature.

After a brief residence at the University, he was regularly indented as an apprentice to his father in 1786. One can hardly imagine a situation less congenial with the ardent, effervescing spirit of a poetic fancy, fettered down to a daily routine of drudgery scarcely above that of a mere scrivener. It proved, however, a useful school of discipline to him. It formed early habits of method, punctuality, and laborious industry; business habits, in short, most adverse to the poetic temperament, but indispensable to the accomplishment of the gigantic tasks which he afterward assumed. He has himself borne testimony to his general diligence in his new vocation, and tells us that on one occasion he transcribed no less than a hundred and twenty folio pages at a sitting.

In the midst of these mechanical duties, he did not lose sight of the favorite objects of his study and meditation. He made frequent excursions into the Lowland as well as Highland districts in search of traditionary relics. These pilgrimages he frequently performed on foot. His constitution, now become hardy by severe training, made him careless of exposure, and his frank and warm-hearted manners—eminently favorable to his purposes, by thawing at once any feelings of frosty reserve which might have encountered a stranger—made him equally welcome at the staid and decorous manse, and at the rough but hospitable board of the peasant. Here was, indeed, the study of the future novelist; the very school in which to

meditate those models of character and situation which he was afterward, long afterward, to transfer, in such living colors, to the canvas. "He was makin' himsell a' the time," says one of his companions, "but he didna ken, maybe, what he was about till years had passed. At first he thought o' little, I dare say, but the queerness and the fun."

The honest writer to the signet does not seem to have thought it either so funny or so profitable; for on his son's return from one of these *raids*, as he styled them, the old gentleman peevishly inquired how he had been living so long. "Pretty much like the young ravens," answered Walter; "I only wished I had been as good a player on the flute as poor George Primrose in the Vicar of Wakefield. If I had his art, I should like nothing better than to tramp like him from cottage to cottage over the world." "I doubt," said the grave clerk to the signet, "I greatly doubt, sir, you were born for nae better than a *gangrel scrapegut*!" Perhaps even the revelation, could it have been made to him, of his son's future literary glory, would scarcely have satisfied the worthy father, who, probably, would have regarded a seat on the bench of the Court of Sessions as much higher glory. At all events, this was not far from the judgment of Dominie Mitchell, who, in his notice of his illustrious pupil, "sincerely regrets that Sir Walter's precious time was devoted to the *dulce* rather than the *utile* of composition, and that his great talents should have been wasted on such subjects!"

It is impossible to glance at Scott's early life without perceiving how powerfully all its circumstances, whether accidental or contrived, conspired to train him for the peculiar position he was destined to occupy in the world of letters. There never was a character in whose infant germ the mature and fully-developed lineaments might be more distinctly traced. What he was in his riper age, so he was in his boyhood. We discern the same tastes, the same peculiar talents, the same

social temper and affections, and, in a great degree, the same habits—in their embryo state of course, but distinctly marked—and his biographer has shown no little skill in enabling us to trace their gradual, progressive expansion, from the hour of his birth up to the full prime and maturity of manhood.

In 1792, Scott, whose original destination of a writer had been changed to that of an advocate—from his father's conviction, as it would seem, of the superiority of his talents to the former station—was admitted to the Scottish bar. Here he continued in assiduous attendance during the regular terms, but more noted for his stories in the Outer House than his arguments in court. It may appear singular, that a person so gifted, both as a writer and as a *raconteur*, should have had no greater success in his profession. But the case is not uncommon. Indeed, experience shows that the most eminent writers have not made the most successful speakers. It is not more strange than that a good writer of novels should not excel as a dramatic author. Perhaps a consideration of the subject would lead us to refer the phenomena in both cases to the same principle. At all events, Scott was an exemplification of both, and we leave the solution to those who have more leisure and ingenuity to unravel the mystery.

Scott's leisure, in the mean time, was well employed in storing his mind with German romance, with whose wild fictions, intrenching on the grotesque, he found at that time more sympathy than in later life. In 1796 he first appeared before the public as a translator of Bürger's well-known ballads, thrown off by him at a heat, and which found favor with the few into whose hands they passed. He subsequently ventured in Monk Lewis's crazy bark, "*Tales of Wonder*," which soon went to pieces, leaving, however, among its surviving fragments the scattered contributions of Scott.

At last, in 1802, he gave to the world his first two volumes of the "*Border Minstrelsy*," printed

by his old schoolfellow, Ballantyne, and which, by the beauty of the typography, as well as literary execution, made an epoch in Scottish literary history. There was no work of Scott's after life which showed the result of so much preliminary labor. Before ten years old, he had collected several volumes of ballads and traditions, and we have seen how diligently he pursued the same vocation in later years. The publication was admitted to be far more faithful, as well as skillfully collated, than its prototype, the "Reliques" of Bishop Percy; while his notes contained a mass of antiquarian information relative to border life, conveyed in a style of beauty unprecedented in topics of this kind, and enlivened with a higher interest than poetic fiction. Percy's "Reliques" had prepared the way for the kind reception of the "Minstrelsy" by the general relish—notwithstanding Dr. Johnson's protest—it had created for the simple pictures of a pastoral and heroic time. Burns had since familiarized the English ear with the Doric melodies of his native land; and now a greater than Burns appeared, whose first production, by a singular chance, came into the world in the very year in which the Ayrshire minstrel was withdrawn from it, as if Nature had intended that the chain of poetic inspiration should not be broken. The delight of the public was farther augmented on the appearance of the third volume of the "Minstrelsy," containing various imitations of the old ballad, which displayed the rich fashion of the antique, purified from the mould and rust by which the beauties of such weather-beaten trophies are defaced.

The first edition of the "Minstrelsy," consisting of eight hundred copies, went off, as Lockhart tells us, in less than a year; and the poet on the publication of a second, received five hundred pounds sterling from Longman—an enormous price for such a commodity, but the best bargain, probably, that the bookseller ever made, as the subsequent sale has since extended to twenty thousand copies.

Scott was not in great haste to follow up his success. It was three years later before he took the field as an independent author, in a poem which at once placed him among the great original writers of his country. The "Lay of the Last Minstrel," a complete expansion of the ancient ballad into an epic form, was published in 1805. It was opening a new creation in the realm of fancy. It seemed as if the author had transfused into his page the strong delineations of the Homeric pencil, the rude, but generous gallantry of a primitive period, softened by the more airy and magical inventions of Italian romance,* and conveyed in tones of natural melody, such as had not been heard since the strains of Burns.

The book speedily found that unprecedented circulation which all his subsequent compositions attained. Other writers had addressed themselves to a more peculiar and limited feeling; to a narrower, and, generally, a more select audience. But Scott was found to combine all the qualities of interest for every order. He drew from the pure springs which gush forth in every heart. His narrative chained every reader's attention by the stirring variety of its incidents, while the fine touches of sentiment with which it abounded, like wild flowers, springing up spontaneously around, were full of freshness and beauty, that made one wonder others should not have stooped to gather them before.

The success of the "Lay" determined the course of its author's future life. Notwithstanding his punctual attention to his profession, his utmost profits for any one year of the ten he had been in

* "Mettendo lo Turpin, lo metto anch' io," says Ariosto, playfully, when he tells a particularly tough story.

"I cannot tell how the truth may be,
I say the tale as 'twas said to me,"
says the author of the "Lay" on a similar occasion. The resemblance might be traced much farther than mere forms of expression, to the Italian, who, like
"the Ariosto of the North,
Sung ladye-love, and war, romance, and knightly worth."

practice had not exceeded two hundred and thirty pounds; and of late they had sensibly declined. Latterly, indeed, he had coquetted somewhat too openly with the Muse for his professional reputation. Themis has always been found a stern and jealous mistress, chary of dispensing her golden favors to those who are seduced into a flirtation with her more volatile sister.

Scott, however, soon found himself in a situation that made him independent of her favors. His income from the two offices to which he was promoted, of Sheriff of Selkirk, and Clerk of the Court of Sessions, was so ample, combined with what fell to him by inheritance and marriage, that he was left at liberty freely to consult his own tastes. Amid the seductions of poetry, however, he never shrunk from his burdensome professional duties; and he submitted to all their drudgery with unflinching constancy, when the labors of his pen made the emoluments almost beneath consideration. He never relished the idea of being divorced from active life by the solitary occupations of a recluse. And his official functions, however severely they taxed his time, may be said to have, in some degree, compensated him by the new scenes of life which they were constantly disclosing—the very materials of those fictions on which his fame and his fortune were to be built.

Scott's situation was eminently propitious to literary pursuits. He was married, and passed the better portion of the year in the country, where the quiet pleasures of his fireside circle, and a keen relish for rural sports, relieved his mind, and invigorated both health and spirits. In early life, it seems, he had been crossed in love; and, like Dante and Byron, to whom, in this respect, he is often compared, he had more than once, according to his biographer, shadowed forth in his verses the object of his unfortunate passion. He does not appear to have taken it very seriously, however, nor to have shown the morbid sensibility in relation to it discovered by both Byron and Dante, whose stern and solitary natures were cast in a

very different mould from the social temper of Scott.

His next great poem was his "Marmion," transcending, in the judgment of many, all his other epics, and containing, in the judgment of all, passages of poetic fire which he never equalled, but which, nevertheless, was greeted on its entrance into the world by a critique, in the leading journal of the day, of the most caustic and unfriendly temper. The journal was the Edinburgh, to which he had been a frequent contributor, and the reviewer was his intimate friend, Jeffrey. The unkindest cut in the article was the imputation of a neglect of Scottish character and feeling. "There is scarcely one trait of true Scottish nationality or patriotism introduced into the whole poem; and Mr. Scott's only expression of admiration for the beautiful country to which he belongs is put, if we rightly remember, into the mouth of one of his Southern favorites." This of Walter Scott!

Scott was not slow, after this, in finding the political principles of the Edinburgh so repugnant to his own (and they certainly were as opposite as the poles), that he first dropped the journal, and next labored with unwearied diligence to organize another, whose main purpose should be to counteract the heresies of the former. This was the origin of the London Quarterly, more imputable to Scott's exertions than to those of any, indeed all other persons. The result has been, doubtless, highly serviceable to the interests of both morals and letters. Not that the new Review was conducted with more fairness, or, in this sense, *principle*, than its antagonist. A remark of Scott's own, in a letter to Ellis, shows with how much principle. "I have run up an attempt on 'The Curse of Kehama' for the Quarterly. It affords cruel openings to the quizzers, and I suppose will get it roundly in the Edinburgh Review. I would have made a very different hand of it, indeed, had the order of the day been *pour déchirer*." But, although the fate of the individual was thus,

to a certain extent, a matter of caprice, or, rather, prejudice in the critic, yet the great abstract questions in morals, politics, and literature, by being discussed on both sides, were presented in a fuller, and, of course, fairer light to the public. Another beneficial result to letters was—and we shall gain credit at least for candor in confessing it—that it broke down somewhat of that divinity which hedged in the despotic *we* of the reviewer, so long as no rival arose to contest the scepter. The claims to infallibility, so long and slavishly acquiesced in, fell to the ground when thus stoutly asserted by conflicting parties. It was pretty clear that the same thing could not be all black and all white at the same time. In short, it was the old story of pope and anti-pope; and the public began to find out that there might be hopes for the salvation of an author, though damned by the literary popedom. Time, by reversing many of its decisions, must at length have shown the same thing.

But to return. Scott showed how nearly he had been touched to the quick by two other acts not so discreet. These were, the establishment of an Annual Register, and of the great publishing house of the Ballantynes, in which he became a silent partner. The last step involved him in grievous embarrassments, and stimulated him to exertions which required “a frame of adamant and soul of fire.” At the same time, we find him overwhelmed with poetical, biographical, historical, and critical compositions, together with editorial labors of appalling magnitude. In this multiplication of himself in a thousand forms, we see him always the same, vigorous and effective. “Poetry,” he says in one of his letters, “is a scourging crop, and ought not to be hastily repeated. Editing, therefore, may be considered as a green crop of turnips or pease, extremely useful to those whose circumstances do not admit of giving their farm a summer fallow.” It might be regretted, however, that he should have wasted powers fitted for so much higher culture on the

coarse products of a kitchen garden, which might have been safely trusted to inferior hands.

In 1811, Scott gave to the world his exquisite poem, "The Lady of the Lake." One of his fair friends had remonstrated with him on thus risking again the laurel he had already won. He replied, with characteristic, and, indeed, prophetic spirit, "If I fail, *I will write prose all my life.* But if I succeed,

'Up wi' the bonnie blue bonnet,
The dirk and the feather an a'!' "

In his eulogy on Byron, Scott remarks, "There has been no reposing under the shade of his laurels, no living upon the resource of past reputation; none of that *coddling* and petty precaution which little authors call 'taking care of their fame.' Byron let his fame take care of itself." Scott could not have more accurately described his own character.

The "Lady of the Lake" was welcomed with an enthusiasm surpassing that which attended any other of his poems. It seemed like the sweet breathings of his native pibroch, stealing over glen and mountain, and calling up all the delicious associations of rural solitude, which beautifully contrasted with the din of battle and the shrill cry of the war-trumpet, that stirred the soul in every page of his "Marmion." The publication of this work carried his fame as a poet to its most brilliant height. The post-horse duty rose to an extraordinary degree in Scotland, from the eagerness of travelers to visit the localities of the poem. A more substantial evidence was afforded in its amazing circulation, and, consequently, its profits. The press could scarcely keep pace with the public demand, and no less than fifty thousand copies of it have been sold since the date of its appearance. The successful author received more than two thousand guineas from his production. Milton received ten pounds for the two editions which he lived to see of his "Paradise Lost." The Ayrshire bard had sighed for "a lass wi' a tocher." Scott

had now found one where it was hardly to be expected, in the Muse.

While the poetical fame of Scott was thus at its zenith, a new star rose above the horizon, whose eccentric course and dazzling radiance completely bewildered the spectator. In 1812, "Childe Harold" appeared, and the attention seemed to be now called, for the first time, from the outward form of man and visible nature, to the secret depths of the soul. The darkest recesses of human passion were laid open, and the note of sorrow was prolonged in tones of agonized sensibility, the more touching as coming from one who was placed on those dazzling heights of rank and fashion which, to the vulgar eye at least, seem to lie in unclouded sunshine. Those of the present generation who have heard only the same key thrummed *ad nauseam* by the feeble imitators of his lordship, can form no idea of the effect produced when the chords were first swept by the master's fingers. It was found impossible for the ear, once attuned to strains of such compass and ravishing harmony, to return with the same relish to purer, it might be, but tamer melody; and the sweet voice of the Scottish minstrel lost much of its power to charm, let him charm never so wisely. While "Rokeby" was in preparation, bets were laid on the rival candidates by the wits of the day. The sale of this poem, though great, showed a sensible decline in the popularity of its author. This became still more evident on the publication of "The Lord of the Isles;" and Scott admitted the conviction with his characteristic spirit and good-nature. "'Well, James' (he said to his printer), 'I have given you a week—what are people saying about the Lord of the Isles?' I hesitated a little, after the fashion of Gil Blas, but he speedily brought the matter to a point. 'Come,' he said, 'speak out, my good fellow; what has put it into your head to be on so much ceremony *with me* all of a sudden? But I see how it is; the result is given in one word—*Disappointment*.' My silence admitted his inference to the

fullest extent. His countenance certainly did look rather blank for few seconds; in truth, he had been wholly unprepared for the event. At length he said, with perfect cheerfulness, 'Well, well, James, so be it; but you know we must not droop, for we can't afford to give over. Since one line has failed, we must stick to something else.''' This *something else* was a mine he had already hit upon, of invention and substantial wealth, such as Thomas the Rhymer, or Michael Scott, or any other adept in the black art had never dreamed of.

Everybody knows the story of the composition of "Waverley"—the most interesting story in the annals of letters—and how, some ten years after its commencement, it was fished out of some old lumber in an attic, and completed in a few weeks for the press in 1814. Its appearance marks a more distinct epoch in English literature than that of the poetry of its author. All previous attempts in the same school of fiction—a school of English growth—had been cramped by the limited information or talent of the writers. Smollett had produced his spirited sea-pieces, and Fielding his warm sketches of country life, both of them mixed up with so much Billingsgate as require a strong flavor of wit to make them tolerable. Richardson had covered acres of canvas with his faithful family pictures. Mrs. Radcliffe had dipped up to the elbows in horrors; while Miss Burney's fashionable gossip, and Miss Edgeworth's Hogarth drawings of the prose—not the poetry—of life and character, had each and all found favor in their respective ways. But a work now appeared in which the author swept over the whole range of character with entire freedom as well as fidelity, ennobling the whole by high historic associations, and in a style varying with his theme, but whose pure and classic flow was tinged with just so much of poetic coloring as suited the purposes of romance. It was Shakspeare in prose.

The work was published, as we know, anony-

mously. Mr. Gillies states, however, that, while in the press, fragments of it were communicated to "Mr. Mackenzie, Dr. Brown, Mrs. Hamilton, and other *savans* or *savantes*, whose dicta on the merits of a new novel were considered unimpeachable." By their approbation "a strong body of friends was formed, and the curiosity of the public prepared the way for its reception." This may explain the rapidity with which the anonymous publication rose into a degree of favor, which, though not less surely, perhaps, it might have been more slow in achieving. The author jealously preserved his incognito, and, in order to heighten the mystification, flung off, almost simultaneously, a variety of works, in prose and poetry, any one of which might have been the labor of months. The public for a moment was at fault. There seemed to be six Richmonds in the field. The world, therefore, was reduced to the dilemma of either supposing that half a dozen different hands could work in precisely the same style, or that one could do the work of half a dozen. With time, however, the veil wore thinner and thinner, until at length, and long before the ingenious argument of Mr. Adolphus, there was scarcely a critic so purblind as not to discern behind it the features of the mighty minstrel.

Constable had offered seven hundred pounds for the new novel. "It was," says Mr. Lockhart, "ten times as much as Miss Edgeworth ever realized from any of her popular Irish tales." Scott declined the offer, which had been a good one for the bookseller had he made it as many thousand. But it passed the art of necromancy to divine this.

Scott, once entered on this new career, followed it up with an energy unrivalled in the history of literature. The public mind was not suffered to cool for a moment, before its attention was called to another miracle of creation from the same hand. Even illness, that would have broken the spirits of most men, as it prostrated the physical energies of Scott, opposed no impediment to the

march of composition. When he could no longer write he could dictate, and in this way, amid the agonies of a racking disease, he composed "The Bride of Lammermoor," the "Legend of Montrose," and a great part of "Ivanhoe." The first, indeed, is darkened with those deep shadows that might seem thrown over it by the somber condition of its author. But what shall we say of the imperturbable dry humor of the gallant Captain Dugald Dalgetty, of Drumthwacket, or of the gorgeous revelries of Ivanhoe—

"Such sights as youthful poets dream,
On summer eves by haunted stream"—

what shall we say of such brilliant day-dreams for a bed of torture? Never before had the spirit triumphed over such agonies of the flesh. "The best way," said Scott, in one of his talks with Gillies, "is, *if possible*, to triumph over disease by setting it at defiance; somewhat on the same principle as one avoids being stung by boldly grasping a nettle."

The prose fictions were addressed to a much larger audience than the poems could be. They had attractions for every age and every class. The profits, of course, were commensurate. Arithmetic has never been so severely taxed as in the computation of Scott's productions and the proceeds resulting from them. In one year he received (or, more properly, was credited with, for it is somewhat doubtful how much he actually received) fifteen thousand pounds for his novels, comprehending the first edition and the copyright. The discovery of this rich mine furnished its fortunate proprietor with the means of gratifying the fondest and even most chimerical desires. He had always coveted the situation of a lord of acres—a Scottish laird—where his passion for planting might find scope in the creation of whole forests—for everything with him was on a magnificent scale—and where he might indulge the kindly feelings of his nature in his benevolent offices to a numerous and dependant tenantry.

The few acres of the original purchase now swelled into hundreds, and, for aught we know, thousands; for one tract alone we find incidentally noticed as costing thirty thousand pounds. "It rounds off the property so handsomely," he says, in one of his letters. There was always a corner to "round off." The mansion, in the mean time, from a simple cottage *ornée*, was amplified into the dimensions almost, as well as the bizarre proportions, of some old feudal castle. The furniture and decorations were of the costliest kind: the wainscots of oak and cedar; the floors tessellated with marbles, or woods of different dyes; the ceilings fretted and carved with the delicate tracery of a Gothic abbey; the storied windows blazoned with the richly-colored insignia of heraldry; the walls garnished with time-honored trophies, or curious specimens of art, or volumes sumptuously bound—in short, with all that luxury could demand or ingenuity devise; while a copious reservoir of gas supplied every corner of the mansion with such fountains of light as must have puzzled the genius of the *lamp* to provide for the less fortunate Aladdin.

Scott's exchequer must have been seriously taxed in another form by the crowds of visitors whom he entertained under his hospitable roof. There was scarcely a person of note, or, to say truth, not of note, who visited that country without paying his respects to the Lion of Scotland. Lockhart reckons up a full sixth of the British peerage who had been there within his recollection; and Captain Hall, in his amusing Notes, remarks, that it was not unusual for a dozen or more coach loads to find their way into his grounds in the course of the day, most of whom found or forced an entrance into the mansion. Such was the heavy tax paid by his celebrity, and, we may add, his good-nature; for, if the one had been a whit less than the other, he could never have tolerated such a nuisance.

The cost of his correspondence gives one no light idea of the demands made on his time as

well as purse, in another form. His postage for letters, independently of franks, by which a large portion of it was covered, amounted to a hundred and fifty pounds, it seems, in the course of the year. In this, indeed, should be included ten pounds for a pair of unfortunate *Cherokee Lovers*, sent all the way from our own happy land in order to be god-fathered by Sir Walter on the London boards. Perhaps the smart-money he had to pay on this interesting occasion had its influence in mixing up rather more acid than was natural to him in his judgments of our countrymen. At all events, the Yankees find little favor on the few occasions on which he has glanced at them in his correspondence. "I am not at all surprised," he says, in a letter to Miss Edgeworth, "I am not at all surprised at what you say of the Yankees. They are a people possessed of very considerable energy, quickened and brought into eager action by an honorable love of their country and pride in their institutions; but they are as yet rude in their ideas of social intercourse, and totally ignorant, speaking generally, of all the art of good-breeding, which consists chiefly in a postponement of one's own petty wishes or comforts to those of others. By rude questions and observations, an absolute disrespect to other people's feelings, and a ready indulgence of their own, they make one feverish in their company, though perhaps you may be ashamed to confess the reason. But this will wear off, and is already wearing away. Men, when they have once got benches, will soon fall into the use of cushions. They are advancing in the lists of our literature, and they will not be long deficient in the *petite morale*, especially as they have, like ourselves, the rage for travelling." On another occasion, he does, indeed, admit having met with, in the course of his life, "four or five well-lettered Americans, ardent in pursuit of knowledge, and free from the ignorance and forward presumption which distinguish many of their countrymen." This seems hard measure, but perhaps we should

find it difficult, among the many who have visited this country, to recollect as great a number of Englishmen—and Scotchmen to boot—entitled to a higher degree of commendation. It can hardly be that the well-informed and well-bred of both countries make a point of staying at home; so we suppose we must look for the solution of the matter in the existence of some disagreeable ingredient, common to the characters of both nations, sprouting, as they do, from a common stock, which remains latent at home, and is never fully disclosed till they get into a foreign climate. But as this problem seems pregnant with philosophical, physiological, and, for aught we know, psychological matter, we have not courage for it here, but recommend the solution to Miss Martineau, to whom it will afford a very good title for a new chapter in her next edition. The strictures we have quoted, however, to speak more seriously, are worth attending to, coming as they do from a shrewd observer, and one whose judgments, though here somewhat colored, no doubt, by political prejudice, are, in the main, distinguished by a sound and liberal philanthropy. But were he ten times an enemy, we would say, "*Eas est ab hoste doceri.*"

With the splendid picture of the baronial residence at Abbotsford, Mr. Lockhart closes all that at this present writing we have received of his delightful work in this country; and in the last sentence the melancholy sound of "the muffled drum" gives ominous warning of what we are to expect in the sixth and concluding volume. In the dearth of more authentic information, we will piece out our sketch with a few facts gleaned from the somewhat meager bill of fare—meager by comparison with the rich banquet of the true *Amphitryon*—afforded by the "Recollections" of Mr. Robert Pierce Gillies.

The unbounded popularity of the Waverly Novels led to still more extravagant anticipations on the part both of the publishers and author. Some hints of a falling off, though but slightly, in the public

favor were unheeded by both parties, though, to say truth, the exact state of things was never disclosed to Scott, it being Ballantyne's notion that it would prove a damper, and that the true course was "to press on more sail as the wind lulled." In these sanguine calculations, not only enormous sums, or, to speak correctly, *bills*, were given for what had been written, but the author's draughts, to the amount of many thousand pounds, were accepted by Constable in favor of works, the very embryos of which lay, not only unformed, but unimagined in the womb of time. In return for this singular accommodation, Scott was induced to endorse the draughts of his publisher, and in this way an amount of liabilities was incurred, which, considering the character of the house and its transactions, it is altogether inexplicable that a person in the independent position of Sir Walter Scott should have subjected himself to for a moment. He seems to have had entire confidence in the stability of the firm, a confidence to which it seems, from Mr. Gillies's account, not to have been entitled from the first moment of his connection with it. The great reputation of the house, however, the success and magnitude of some of its transactions, especially the publication of these novels, gave it a large credit, which enabled it to go forward with a great show of prosperity in ordinary times, and veiled its tottering state probably from Constable's own eyes. It is but the tale of yesterday. The case of Constable and Co., is, unhappily, a very familiar one to us. But when the hurricane of 1825 came on, it swept away all those buildings that were not founded on a rock, and those of Messrs. Constable, among others, soon became literally mere *castles in the air*—in plain English, the firm stopped payment. The assets were very trifling in comparison with the debts; and Sir Walter Scott was found on their paper to the frightful amount of one hundred thousand pounds!

His conduct on the occasion was precisely what was to have been anticipated from one who had de-

closed on a similar, though much less appalling conjuncture, "I am always ready to make any sacrifice to do justice to my engagements, and would rather sell anything, or everything, than be less than a true man to the world." He put up his house and furniture in town at auction, delivered over his personal effects at Abbotsford, his plate, books, furniture, etc., to be held in trust for his creditors (the estate itself had been recently secured to his son on occasion of his marriage), and bound himself to discharge a certain amount annually of the liabilities of the insolvent firm. He then, with his characteristic energy, set about the performance of his Herculean task. He took lodgings in a third-rate house in St. David's street, saw but little company, abridged the hours usually devoted to his meals and his family, gave up his ordinary exercise, and, in short, adopted the severe habits of a regular Grub street stipendiary.

"For many years," he said to Mr. Gillies, "I have been accustomed to hard work, because I found it a pleasure; now, with all due respect for Falstaff's principle, 'nothing on compulsion,' I certainly will not shrink from work because it has become necessary."

One of his first tasks was his "Life of Bonaparte," achieved in the space of thirteen months. For this he received fourteen thousand pounds, about eleven hundred per month—not a bad bargain either, as it proved, for the publishers. The first two volumes of the nine which make up the English edition were a *refacimento* of what he had before compiled for the "Annual Register." With every allowance for the inaccuracies, and the excessive expansion incident to such a flashing rapidity of execution, the work, taking into view the broad range of its topics, its shrewd and sagacious reflections, and the free, bold, and picturesque coloring of its narration, and, above all, considering *the brief time in which it was written*, is indisputably one of the most remarkable monuments of genius and industry—perhaps the most remarkable ever recorded.

Scott's celebrity made everything that fell from him, however trifling—the dewdrops from the lion's mane—of value. But none of the many adventures he embarked in, or, rather, set afloat, proved so profitable as the republication of his novels, with his notes and illustrations. As he felt his own strength in the increasing success of his labors, he appears to have relaxed somewhat from them, and to have again resumed somewhat of his ancient habits, and, in a mitigated degree, his ancient hospitality. But still his exertions were too severe, and pressed heavily on the springs of his health, already deprived by age of their former elasticity and vigor. At length, in 1831, he was overtaken by one of those terrible shocks of paralysis which seem to have been constitutional in his family, but which, with more precaution, and under happier auspices, might, doubtless, have been postponed, if not wholly averted. At this time he had, in the short space of little more than five years, by his sacrifices and efforts, discharged about two-thirds of the debt for which he was responsible: an astonishing result, wholly unparalleled in the history of letters! There is something inexpressibly painful in this spectacle of a generous heart thus courageously contending with fortune, bearing up against the tide with unconquerable spirit, and finally overwhelmed by it just within reach of shore.

The rest of his story is one of humiliation and sorrow. He was induced to take a voyage to the Continent to try the effect of a more genial climate. Under the sunny sky of Italy, he seemed to gather new strength for a while; but his eye fell with indifference on the venerable monuments which, in better days, would have kindled all his enthusiasm. The invalid sighed for his own home at Abbotsford. The heat of the weather and the fatigue of rapid travel brought on another shock, which reduced him to a state of deplorable imbecility. In this condition he returned to his own halls, where the sight of early friends, and of the beautiful scenery, the creation, as it were, of his

own hands, seemed to impart a gleam of melancholy satisfaction, which soon, however, sunk into insensibility. To his present situation might well be applied the exquisite verses which he indited on another melancholy occasion:

“Yet not the landscape to mine eye
Bears those bright hues that once it bore;
Though Evening, with her richest dye,
Flames o’er the hills of Ettrick’s shore.

“With listless look along the plain
I see Tweed’s silver current glide,
And coldly mark the holy fane
Of Melrose rise in ruined pride.

“The quiet lake, the balmy air,
The hill, the stream, the tower, the tree,
Are they still such as once they were,
Or is the dreary change in me?”

Providence, in its mercy, did not suffer the shattered frame long to outlive the glorious spirit which had informed it. He breathed his last on the 21st of September, 1832. His remains were deposited, as he had always desired, in the hoary abbey of Dryburgh, and the pilgrim from many a distant clime shall repair to the consecrated spot so long as the reverence for exalted genius and worth shall survive in the human heart.

This sketch, brief as we could make it, of the literary history of Sir Walter Scott, has extended so far as to leave but little space for—what Lockhart’s volumes afforded ample materials for—his personal character. Take it for all and all, it is not too much to say that this character is probably the most remarkable on record. There is no man of historical celebrity that we now recall, who combined, in so eminent a degree, the highest qualities of the moral, the intellectual, and the physical. He united in his own character what hitherto had been found incompatible. Though a poet, and living in an ideal world, he was an exact, methodical man of business; though achieving with the most wonderful facility of genius, he was patient and laborious; a mousing antiquarian, yet with the most active interest in the present,

and whatever was going on around him; with a strong turn for a roving life and military adventure, he was yet chained to his desk more hours at some periods of his life, than a monkish recluse; a man with a heart as capacious as his head; a Tory, brim full of Jacobitism, yet full of sympathy and unaffected familiarity with all classes, even the humblest; a successful author, without pedantry and without conceit; one, indeed, at the head of the republic of letters, and yet with a lower estimate of letters, as compared with other intellectual pursuits, than was ever hazarded before. The first quality of his character, or, rather, that which forms the basis of it, as of all great characters, was his energy. We see it, in his early youth, triumphing over the impediments of nature, and, in spite of lameness, making him conspicuous in every sort of athletic exercise—clambering up dizzy precipices, wading through treacherous fords, and performing feats of pedestrianism that make one's joints ache to read of. As he advanced in life, we see the same force of purpose turned to higher objects. A striking example occurs in his organization of the journals and the publishing house in opposition to Constable. In what Herculean drudgery did not this latter business, in which he undertook to supply matter for the nimble press of Balantyne, involve him! while, in addition to his own concerns, he had to drag along by his solitary momentum a score of heavier undertakings, that led Lockhart to compare him to a steam-engine, with a train of coal wagons hitched to it. "Yes," said Scott, laughing, and making a crashing cut with his axe (for they were felling larches), "and there was a cursed lot of dung carts too."

We see the same powerful energies triumphing over disease at a later period, when nothing but a resolution to get the better of it enabled him to do so. "Be assured," he remarked to Mr. Gillies, "that if pain could have prevented my application to literary labor, not a page of *Ivanhoe* would have been written. Now if I had given way to mere feelings, and ceased to work, it is a question

whether the disorder might not have taken a deeper root, and become incurable." But the most extraordinary instance of this trait is the readiness with which he assumed and the spirit with which he carried through, till his mental strength broke down under it, the gigantic task imposed on him by the failure of Constable.

It mattered little what the nature of the task was, whether it were organizing an opposition to a political faction, or a troop of cavalry to resist invasion, or a medley of wild Highlanders or Edinburgh cockneys to make up a royal puppet-show—a loyal celebration—for "His Most Sacred Majesty"—he was the master-spirit that gave the cue to the whole *dramatis personæ*. This potent impulse showed itself in the thoroughness with which he prescribed, ~~not~~ merely the general orders, but the execution of the minutest details, in his own person. Thus all around him was the creation, as it were, of his individual exertion. His lands waved with forests planted with his own hands, and, in process of time, cleared by his own hands. He did not lay the stones in mortar, exactly, for his whimsical castle, but he seems to have superintended the operation from the foundation to the battlements. The antique relics, the curious works of art, the hangings and furniture, even, with which his halls were decorated, were specially contrived or selected by him; and, to read his letters at this time to his friend Terry, one might fancy himself perusing the correspondence of an upholsterer, so exact and technical is he in his instruction. We say this not in disparagement of his great qualities. It is only the more extraordinary; for, while he stooped to such trifles, he was equally thorough in matter of the highest moment. It was a trait of character.

Another quality, which, like the last, seems to have given the tone to his character, was his social or benevolent feelings. His heart was an unfailing fountain, which not merely the distresses, but the joys of his fellow-creatures made to flow like water. In early life, and possibly sometimes in

later, high spirits and a vigorous constitution led him occasionally to carry his social propensities into convivial excess; but he never was in danger of the habitual excess to which a vulgar mind—and sometimes, alas! one more finely tuned—abandons itself. With all his conviviality, it was not the sensual relish, but the social, which acted on him. He was neither *gourmé* nor *gourmand*; but his social meetings were endeared to him by the free interchange of kindly feelings with his friends. La Bruyère says (and it is odd he should have found it out in Louis the Fourteenth's court), "the heart has more to do than the head with the pleasures, or, rather, promoting the pleasures of society;" "Un homme est d'un meilleur commerce dans la société par le cœur que par l'esprit." If report—the report of travelers—be true, we Americans, at least the New-Englanders, are too much perplexed with the cares and crosses of life to afford many genuine specimens of this *bon-homme*. However this may be, we all, doubtless, know some such character, whose shining face, the index of a cordial heart, radiant with beneficent pleasure, diffuses its own exhilarating glow wherever it appears. Rarely, indeed, is this precious quality found united with the most exalted intellect. Whether it be that Nature, chary of her gifts, does not care to shower too many of them on one head; or that the public admiration has led the man of intellect to set too high a value on himself, or at least his own pursuits, to take an interest in the inferior concerns of others; or that the fear of compromising his dignity puts him "on points" with those who approach him; or whether, in truth, the very magnitude of his own reputation throws a freezing shadow over us little people in his neighborhood—whatever be the cause, it is too true that the highest powers of mind are very often deficient in the only one which can make the rest of much worth in society—the power of pleasing.

Scott was not one of these little great. His was not one of those dark-lantern visages which con-

concentrate all their light on their own path, and are black as midnight to all about them. He had a ready sympathy, a word of contagious kindness, or cordial greeting, for all. His manners, too, were of a kind to dispel the icy reserve and awe which his great name was calculated to inspire. His frank address was a sort of *open sesame* to every heart. He did not deal in sneers, the poisoned weapons which come not from the head, as the man who launches them is apt to think, but from an acid heart, or, perhaps, an acid stomach, a very common laboratory of such small artillery. Neither did Scott amuse the company with parliamentary harangues or metaphysical disquisitions. His conversation was of the narrative kind, not formal, but as casually suggested by some passing circumstance or topic, and thrown in by way of illustration. He did not repeat himself, however, but continued to give his anecdotes such variations, by rigging them out in a new "cocked hat and walking-cane," as he called it, that they never tired like the thrice-told tale of a chronic *raconteur*. He allowed others, too, to take their turn, and thought with the Dean of St. Patrick's:

"Carve to all, but just enough,
Let them neither starve nor stuff:
And, that you may have your due,
Let your neighbors carve for you."

He relished a good joke, from whatever quarter it came, and was not over-dainty in his manner of testifying his satisfaction. "In the full tide of mirth, he did indeed laugh the heart's laugh," says Mr. Adolphus. "Give me an honest laugh-er," said Scott himself, on another occasion, when a buckram man of fashion had been paying him a visit at Abbotsford. His manners, free from affectation or artifice of any sort, exhibited the spontaneous movements of a kind disposition, subject to those rules of good breeding which Nature herself might have dictated. In this way he answered his own purpose admirably as a painter of character, by putting every man in good humor with himself, in the same manner as a

cunning portrait-painter amuses his sitters with such store of fun and anecdote as may throw them off their guard, and call out the happiest expressions of their countenances.

Scott, in his wide range of friends and companions, does not seem to have been over-fastidious. In the instance of John Ballantyne, it has exposed him to some censure. In truth, a more worthless fellow never hung on the skirts of a great man; for he did not take the trouble to throw a decent veil over the grossest excesses. But then he had been the schoolboy friend of Scott, had grown up with him in a sort of dependance—a relation which begets a kindly feeling in the party that confers the benefits, at least. How strong it was in him may be inferred from his remark at his funeral. "I feel," said Scott, mournfully, as the solemnity was concluded, "I feel as if there would be less sunshine for me from this day forth." It must be admitted, however, that his intimacy with little Rigdumfunnidos, whatever apology it may find in Scott's heart, was not very creditable to his taste.

But the benevolent principle showed itself not merely in words, but in the more substantial form of actions. How many are the cases recorded of indigent merit, which he drew from obscurity, and almost warmed into life by his own generous and most delicate patronage! Such were the cases, among others, of Leyden, Weber, Hogg. How often and how cheerfully did he supply such literary contributions as were solicited by his friends—and they taxed him pretty liberally—amid all the pressure of business, and at the height of his fame, when his hours were golden hours to him! In the more vulgar and easier forms of charity, he did not stint his hand, though, instead of direct assistance, he preferred to enable others to assist themselves; in this way fortifying their good habits, and relieving them from the sense of personal degradation.

But the place where his benevolent impulses found their proper theater for expansion was his

own home; surrounded by a happy family, and dispensing all the hospitalities of a great feudal proprietor. "There are many good things in life," he says, in one of his letters, "whatever satirists and misanthropes may say to the contrary; but probably the best of all, next to a conscience void of offence (without which, by-the-by, they can hardly exist), are the quiet exercise and enjoyment of the social feelings, in which we are at once happy ourselves, and the cause of happiness to them who are dearest to us." Every page of the work, almost, shows us how intimately he blended himself with the pleasures and the pursuits of his own family, watched over the education of his children, shared in their rides, their rambles, and sports, losing no opportunity of kindling in their young minds a love of virtue, and honorable principles of action. He delighted, too, to collect his tenantry around him, multiplying holidays, when young and old might come together under his roof-tree, when the jolly punch was liberally dispensed by himself and his wife among the elder people, and the *Hogmanay* cakes and pennies were distributed among the young ones; while his own children mingled in the endless reels and hornpipes on the earthen floor, and the *laird* himself, mixing in the groups of merry faces, had "his private joke for every old wife or 'gausie carle,' his arch compliment for the ear of every bonny lass, and his hand and his blessing for the head of every little *Eppie Daidle* from Abbotstown or Broomylees." "Sir Walter," said one of his old retainers, "speaks to every man as if he were his blood relation." No wonder that they should have returned this feeling with something warmer than blood relations usually do. Mr. Gillies tells an anecdote of the Ettrick Shepherd, showing how deep a root such feelings, notwithstanding his rather odd way of expressing them, sometimes, had taken in his honest nature. "Mr. James Ballantyne, walking home with him one evening from Scott's, where, by-the-by, Hogg had gone uninvited, happened to observe, 'I do not

at all like this illness of Scott's; I have often seen him look jaded, and am afraid it is serious.' 'Haud your tongue, or I'll gar you measure your length on the pavement!' replied Hogg. 'You fause down-hearted loon that you are; ye daur to speak as if Scott were on his death-bed! It cannot be—it *must* not be! I will not suffer you to speak that gait.' The sentiment was like that of Uncle Toby at the bedside of Le Fevre; and, at these words, the Shepherd's voice became suppressed with emotion." But Scott's sympathies were not confined to his species, and if he treated them like blood relations, he treated his brute followers like personal friends. Every one remembers old Maida and faithful Camp, the "dear old friend," whose loss cost him a dinner. Mr. Gillies tells us that he went into his study on one occasion, when he was winding off his "Vision of Don Roderick." "'Look here,' said the poet, 'I have just begun to copy over the rhymes that you heard to-day and applauded so much. Return to supper if you can; only don't be late, as you perceive we keep early hours, and Wallace will not suffer me to rest after six in the morning. Come, good dog, and help the poet.' At this hint, Wallace seated himself upright on a chair next his master, who offered him a newspaper, which he directly seized, looking very wise, and holding it firmly and contentedly in his mouth. Scott looked at him with great satisfaction, for he was excessively fond of dogs. 'Very well,' said he; '*now* we shall get on.' And so I left them abruptly, knowing that my 'absence would be the best company.' " This fellowship extended much farther than to his canine followers, of which, including hounds, terriers, mastiffs, and mongrels, he had certainly a goodly assortment. We find, also, Grimalkin installed in a responsible post in the library, and out of doors pet hens, pet donkeys, and—tell it not in Judæa—a pet pig!

Scott's sensibilities, though easily moved and widely diffused, were warm and sincere. None shared more cordially in the troubles of his friends;

but on all such occasions, with a true manly feeling, he thought less of mere sympathy than of the most effectual way for mitigating their sorrows. After a touching allusion in one of his epistles to his dear friend Erskine's death, he concludes, "I must turn to and see what can be done about getting some pension for his daughters." In another passage, which may remind one of some of the exquisite touches in Jeremy Taylor, he indulges in the following beautiful strain of philosophy: "The last three or four years have swept away more than half the friends with whom I lived in habits of great intimacy. So it must be with us

'When apace life's day draws near the gloamin','

and yet we proceed with our plantations and plans as if any tree but the sad cypress would accompany us to the grave, where our friends have gone before us. It is the way of the world, however, and must be so; otherwise life would be spent in unavailing mourning for those whom we have lost. It is better to enjoy the society of those who remain to us." His well-disciplined heart seems to have confessed the influence of this philosophy in his most ordinary relations. "I can't help it," was a favorite maxim of his, "and therefore will not think about it; for that, at least, I *can* help."

Among his admirable qualities must not be omitted a certain worldly sagacity or shrewdness, which is expressed as strongly as any individual trait can be in some of his portraits, especially in the excellent one of him by Leslie. Indeed, his countenance would seem to exhibit, ordinarily, much more of Dandie Dinmont's benevolent shrewdness than of the eye glancing from earth to heaven, which in fancy we assign to the poet, and which, in some moods, must have been his. This trait may be readily discerned in his business transactions, which he managed with perfect knowledge of character as well as of his own rights. No one knew better than he the market

value of an article; and, though he underrated his literary wares as to their mere literary rank, he set as high a money value on them, and made as sharp a bargain as any of the *trade* could have done. In his business concerns, indeed, he managed rather too much, or, to speak more correctly, was too fond of mixing up mystery in his transactions, which, like most mysteries, proved of little service to their author. Scott's correspondence, especially with his son, affords obvious examples of shrewdness, in the advice he gives as to his deportment in the novel situations and society into which the young cornet was thrown. Occasionally, in the cautious hints about etiquette and social observances, we may be reminded of that ancient "*arbiter elegantiarum*," Lord Chesterfield, though it must be confessed there is throughout a high moral tone, which the noble lord did not very scrupulously affect.

Another feature in Scott's character was his loyalty, which some people would extend into a more general deference to rank not royal. We do certainly meet with a tone of deference, occasionally, to the privileged orders (or, rather, privileged persons, as the king, or his own chief, for to the mass of stars and garters he showed no such respect), which falls rather unpleasantly on the ear of a Republican. But, independently of the feelings which rightfully belonged to him as the subject of a monarchy, and without which he must have been a falsehearted subject, his own were heightened by a poetical coloring, that mingled in his mind even with much more vulgar relations of life. At the opening of the regalia in Holyrood House, when the honest burgomaster deposited the crown on the head of one of the young ladies present, the good man probably saw nothing more in the dingy diadem than we should have seen—a headpiece for a set of men no better than himself, and, if the old adage of a "dead lion" holds true, not quite so good. But to Scott's imagination other views were unfolded. "A thousand years their cloudy wings expanded"

around him, and, in the dim visions of distant times, he beheld the venerable line of monarchs who had swayed the councils of his country in peace and led her armies in battle. The "golden round" became in his eye the symbol of his nation's glory; and as he heaved a heavy oath from his heart, he left the room in agitation, from which he did not speedily recover. There was not a spice of affectation in this—for who ever accused Scott of affectation?—but there was a good deal of poetry, the poetry of sentiment.

We have said that this feeling mingled in the more common concerns of his life. His cranium, indeed, to judge from his busts, must have exhibited a strong development of the organ of veneration. He regarded with reverence everything connected with antiquity. His establishment was on the feudal scale; his house was fashioned more after the feudal ages than his own; and even in the ultimate distribution of his fortune, although the circumstance of having made it himself relieved him from any legal necessity of contravening the suggestions of natural justice, he showed such attachment to the old aristocratic usage as to settle nearly the whole of it on his eldest son. The influence of this poetic sentiment is discernible in his most trifling acts, in his tastes, his love of the arts, his social habits. His museum, house, and grounds were adorned with relics, curious not so much from their workmanship as their historic associations. It was the ancient fountain from Edinburgh, the Tolbooth lintels, the blunderbuss and spleughan of Rob Roy, the drinking-cup of Prince Charlie, or the like. It was the same in the arts. The tunes he loved were not the refined and complex melodies of Italy, but the simple notes of his native minstrelsy, from the bagpipe of John of Skye, or from the harp of his own lovely and accomplished daughter. So, also, in painting. It was not the masterly designs of the great Flemish and Italian schools that adorned his walls, but some portrait of Claverhouse, or of Queen Mary, or of

"glorious old John." In architecture we see the same spirit in the singular "romance of stone and lime," which may be said to have been his own device, down to the minutest details of its finishing. We see it again in the joyous celebrations of his feudal tenantry, the good old festivals, the Hogmanay, the Kirn, etc., long fallen into disuetude, when the old Highland piper sounded the same wild pibroch that had so often summoned the clans together, for war or for wassail, among the fastnesses of the mountains. To the same source, in fine, may be traced the feelings of superstition which seemed to hover round Scott's mind like some "strange, mysterious dream," giving a romantic coloring to his conversation and his writings, but rarely, if ever, influencing his actions. It was a poetic sentiment.

Scott was a Tory to the backbone. Had he come into the world half a century sooner, he would, no doubt, have made a figure under the banner of the Pretender. He was at no great pains to disguise his political creed; witness his jolly drinking-song on the acquittal of Lord Melville. This was verse; but his prose is not much more qualified. "As for Whiggery in general," he says, in one of his letters, "I can only say that, as no man can be said to be utterly upset until his rump has been higher than his head, so I cannot read in history of any free state which has been brought to slavery until the rascal and uninstructed populace had had their short hour of anarchical government, which naturally leads to the stern repose of military despotism. . . . With these convictions, I am very jealous of Whiggery under all modifications, and I must say my acquaintance with the total want of principle in some of its warmest professors does not tend to recommend it." With all this, however, his Toryism was not, practically, of that sort which blunts a man's sensibilities for those who are not of the same porcelain clay with himself. No man, Whig or Radical, ever had less of this pretension, or treated his inferiors with greater kind-

ness, and even familiarity; a circumstance noticed by every visitor at his hospitable mansion who saw him strolling round his grounds taking his pinch of snuff out of the mull of some "gray-haired old hedger," or leaning on honest Tom Purdie's shoulder, and taking sweet counsel as to the right method of thinning a plantation. But, with all this familiarity, no man was better served by his domestics. It was the service of love, the only service that power cannot command and money cannot buy.

Akin to the feelings of which we have been speaking was the truly chivalrous sense of honor which stamped his whole conduct. We do not mean that Hotspur honor which is roused only by the drum and fife—though he says of himself, "I like the sound of a drum as well as Uncle Toby ever did"—but that honor which is deep-seated in the heart of every true gentleman, shrinking with sensitive delicacy from the least stain, or imputation of a stain, on his faith. "If we lose everything else," writes he, on a trying occasion to a friend who was not so nice in this particular, "we will at least keep our honor unblemished." It reminds one of the pithy epistle of a kindred chivalrous spirit, Francis the First, to his mother, from the unlucky field of Pavia: "*Tout est perdu, fors l'honneur.*" Scott's latter years furnished a noble commentary on the sincerity of his manly principles.

Little is said directly of his religious sentiments in the biography. They seem to have harmonized well with his political. He was a member of the English Church, a stanch champion of established forms, and a sturdy enemy to everything that savored of the sharp tang of Puritanism. On this ground, indeed, the youthful Samson used to wrestle manfully with worthy Dominie Mitchell, who, no doubt, furnished many a screed of doctrine for the Rev. Peter Poundtext, Master Nehemiah Holdenough, and other lights of the Covenant. Scott was no friend to cant under any form. But, whatever were his speculative opinions, in

practice his heart overflowed with that charity which is the life-spring of our religion; and whenever he takes occasion to allude to the subject directly, he testifies a deep reverence for the truths of revelation, as well as for its Divine original.

Whatever estimate be formed of Scott's moral qualities, his intellectual were of a kind which well entitled him to the epithet conferred on Lope de Vega, "*monstruo de naturaleza*" (a miracle of nature). His mind scarcely seemed to be subjected to the same laws that control the rest of his species. His memory, as is usual, was the first of his powers fully developed. While an urchin at school, he could repeat whole cantos, he says, of Ossian and of Spenser. In riper years we are constantly meeting with similar feats of his achievement. Thus, on one occasion, he repeated the whole of a poem in some penny magazine, incidentally alluded to, which he had not seen since he was a schoolboy. On another, when the Ettrick Shepherd was trying ineffectually to fish up from his own recollections some scraps of a ballad he had himself manufactured years before, Scott called to him, "Take your pencil, Jemmy, and I will tell it to you, word for word;" and he accordingly did so. But it is needless to multiply examples of feats so startling as to look almost like the tricks of a conjurer.

What is most extraordinary is, that while he acquired with such facility, that the bare perusal, or the repetition of a thing once to him, was sufficient, he yet retained it with greatest pertinacity. Other men's memories are so much jostled in the rough and tumble of life, that most of the facts get sifted out nearly as fast as they are put in; so that we are in the same dilemma with those unlucky daughters of Danaus, of schoolboy memory, obliged to spend the greater part of the time in replenishing. But Scott's memory seemed to be hermetically sealed, suffering nothing once fairly in to leak out again. This was of immense service to him when he took up the business of authorship,

as his whole multifarious stock of facts, whether from books or observation, became, in truth, his stock in trade, ready furnished to his hands. This may explain in part—though it is not less marvellous—the cause of his rapid execution of works, often replete with rare and curious information. The labor, the preparation, had been already completed. His whole life had been a business of preparation. When he ventured, as in the case of “Rokeby” and of “Quentin Durward,” on ground with which he had not been familiar, we see how industriously he set about new acquisitions.

In most of the prodigies of memory which we have ever known, the overgrowth of that faculty seems to have been attained at the expense of all the others; but in Scott, the directly opposite power of the imagination, the inventive power, was equally strongly developed, and at the same early age; for we find him renowned for story-craft while at school. How many a delightful fiction, warm with the flush of ingenuous youth, did he not throw away on the ears of thoughtless childhood, which, had they been duly registered, might now have amused children of a larger growth! We have seen Scott’s genius in its prime and its decay. The frolic graces of childhood are alone wanting.

The facility with which he threw his ideas into language was also remarked very early. One of his first ballads, and a long one, was dashed off at the dinner-table. His “Lay” was written at the rate of a canto a week. “Waverly,” or, rather, the last two volumes of it, cost the evenings of a summer month. Who that has ever read the account can forget the movements of that mysterious hand, as described by the two students from the window of a neighboring attic, throwing off sheet after sheet, with untiring rapidity, of the pages destined to immortality? Scott speaks pleasantly enough of this marvellous facility in a letter to his friend Morritt: “When once I set my pen to the paper, it will walk fast enough. I am

sometimes tempted to leave it alone, and see whether it will not write as well without the assistance of my head as with it. A hopeful prospect for the reader."

As to the time and place of composition, he appears to have been nearly indifferent. He possessed entire power of abstraction, and it mattered little whether he were nailed to his clerk's desk, under the drowsy eloquence of some long-winded barrister, or dashing his horse into the surf on Portobello sands, or rattling in a post-chaise, or amid the hum of guests in his overflowing halls at Abbotsford—it mattered not; the same well-adjusted little packet, "nicely corded and sealed," was sure to be ready, at the regular time, for the Edinburgh mail. His own account of his composition to a friend, who asked when he found time for it, is striking enough. "Oh," said Scott, "I lie *simmering* over things for an hour or so before I get up, and there's the time I am drossing to overhaul my half sleeping, half waking *projet de chapitre*; and when I get the paper before me, it commonly runs off pretty easily. Besides, I often take a doze in the plantations, and while Tom marks out a dike or a drain as I have directed, one's fancy may be running its ain riggs in some other world." Never did this sort of simmering produce such a splendid bill of fare.

The quality of the material, under such circumstances, is, in truth, the great miracle of the whole. The execution of so much work, as a mere feat of penmanship, would undoubtedly be very extraordinary, but as a mere scrivener's miracle, would be hardly worth recording. It is a sort of miracle that is every day performing under our own eyes, as it were, by Messrs. James, Bulwer, & Co., who, in all the various staples of "comedy, history, pastoral-comical, historical-pastoral," etc., supply their own market, and ours too, with all that can be wanted. In Spain, and in Italy also, we may find abundance of *improvvisatori* and *improvvisatrici*, who perform miracles of the same sort, in verse, too, in languages whose vowel ter-

minations make it very easy for the thoughts to tumble into rhyme, without any malice prepense. Sir Stamford Raffles, in his account of Java, tells us of a splendid avenue of trees before his house, which in the course of a year shot up to the height of forty feet. But who shall compare the brief, transitory splendors of a fungus vegetation with the mighty monarch of the forest, sending his roots deep into the heart of the earth, and his branches, amid storm and sunshine, to the heavens? And is not the latter the true emblem of Scott? For who can doubt that his prose creations, at least, will gather strength with time, living on through succeeding generations, even when the language in which they are written, like those of Greece and Rome, shall cease to be a living language?

The only writer deserving, in these respects, to be named with Scott, is Lope de Vega, who in his own day held as high a rank in the republic of letters as our great contemporary. The beautiful dramas which he threw off for the entertainment of the capital, and whose success drove Cervantes from the stage, outstripped the abilities of an amanuensis to copy. His intimate friend, Montalvan, one of the most popular and prolific authors of the time, tells us that he undertook with Lope once to supply the theater with a comedy—in verse, and in three acts, as the Spanish dramas usually were—at a very short notice. In order to get through his half as soon as his partner, he rose by two in the morning, and at eleven had completed it; an extraordinary feat, certainly, since a play extended to between thirty and forty pages, of a hundred lines each. Walking into the garden, he found his brother poet pruning an orange-tree. “Well, how do you get on?” said Montalvan. “Very well,” answered Lope. “I rose betimes—at five; and after I had got through, eat my breakfast; since which I have written a letter of fifty triplets, and watered the whole of the garden, which has tired me a good deal.”

But a little arithmetic will best show the com-

parative fertility of Scott and Lope de Vega. It is so germane to the present matter, that we shall make no apology for transcribing here some computations from our last July number; and as few of our readers, we suspect, have the air-tight memory of Sir Walter, we doubt not that enough of it has escaped them by this time to excuse us from equipping it with one of those "cocked hats and walking-sticks" with which he furbished up an old story.

"It is impossible to state the results of Lope de Vega's labors in any form that will not powerfully strike the imagination: Thus, he has left twenty-one millions three hundred thousand verses in print, besides a mass of manuscript. He furnished the theater, according to the statement of his intimate friend, Mantalvan, with eighteen hundred regular plays, and four hundred *autos* or religious dramas—all acted. He composed, according to his own statement, more than one hundred comedies in the almost incredible space of twenty-four hours each; and a comedy averaged between two and three thousand verses, great part of them rhymed, and interspersed with sonnets, and other more difficult forms of versification. He lived seventy-two years; and supposing him to have employed fifty of that period in composition, although he filled a variety of engrossing vocations during that time, he must have averaged a play a week, to say nothing of twenty-one volumes, quarto, of miscellaneous works, including five epics, written in his leisure moments, and all now in print!

"The only achievements we can recall in literary history bearing any resemblance to, though falling far short of this, are those of our illustrious contemporary, Sir Walter Scott. The complete edition of his works, recently advertised by Murray, with the edition of two volumes of which Murray has not the copyright, probably contains ninety volumes, small octavo. [To these should farther be added a large supply of matter for the Edinburgh Annual Register, as well as other an-

onymous contributions.] Of these, forty-eight volumes of novels, and twenty-one of history and biography, were produced between 1814 and 1831, or in seventeen years. These would give an average of four volumes a year, or one for every three months during the whole of that period; to which must be added twenty-one volumes of poetry and prose, previously published. The mere mechanical execution of so much work, both in his case and Lope de Vega's, would seem to be scarce possible in the limits assigned. Scott, too, was as variously occupied in other ways as his Spanish rival; and probably, from the social hospitality of his life, spent a much larger portion of his time in no literary occupation at all."

Of all the wonderful dramatic creations of Lope de Vega's genius, what now remains? Two or three plays only keep possession of the stage, and few, very few, are still read with pleasure in the closet. They have never been collected into a uniform edition, and are now met with in scattered sheets only on the shelves of some mousing bookseller, or collected in miscellaneous parcels in the libraries of the curious.

Scott, with all his facility of execution, had none of that pitiable affectation sometimes found in men of genius, who think that the possession of this quality may dispense with regular, methodical habits of study. He was most economical of time. He did not, like Voltaire, speak of it as "a terrible thing that so much time should be wasted in talking." He was too little of a pedant, and far too benevolent, not to feel that there are other objects worth living for than mere literary fame; but he grudged the waste of time on merely frivolous and heartless objects. "As for dressing when we are quite alone," he remarked one day to Mr. Gillies, whom he had taken home with him to a family dinner, "it is out of the question. Life is not long enough for such fiddle-faddle." In the early part of his life he worked late at night, but, subsequently, from a conviction of the superior healthiness of early rising, as well as the

desire to secure, at all hazards, a portion of the day for literary labor, he rose at five the year round; no small effort, as any one will admit who has seen the pain and difficulty which a regular bird of night finds in reconciling his eyes to day light. He was scrupulously exact, moreover, in the distribution of his hours. In one of his letters to his friend Terry, the player, replete, as usual, with advice that seems to flow equally from the head and the heart, he says, in reference to the practice of *dawdling* away one's time, "A habit of the mind it is which is very apt to beset men of intellect and talent, especially when their time is not regularly filled up, but left to their own arrangement. But it is like the ivy round the oak, and ends by limiting, if it does not destroy, the power of manly and necessary exertion. I must love a man so well, to whom I offer such a word of advice, that I will not apologize for it, but expect to hear you are become *as regular as a Dutch clock—hours, quarters, minutes, all marked and appropriated.*" With the same emphasis he inculcates the like habits on his son. If any man might dispense with them, it was surely Scott. But he knew that without them the greatest powers of mind will run to waste, and water but the desert.

Some of the literary opinions of Scott are singular, considering, too, the position he occupied in the world of letters. "I promise you," he says, in an epistle to an old friend, "my oaks will outlast my laurels; and I pique myself more on my compositions for manure than on any other compositions to which I was ever accessory." This may seem *badinage*; but he repeatedly, both in writing and conversation, places literature, as a profession, below other intellectual professions, and especially the military. The Duke of Wellington, the representative of the last, seems to have drawn from him a very extraordinary degree of deference, which we cannot but think smacks a little of that strong relish for gunpowder which he avows in himself.

It is not very easy to see on what this low estimate of literature rested. As a profession, it has too little in common with more active ones, to afford much ground for running a parallel. The soldier has to do with externals; and his contests and triumphs are over matter in its various forms, whether of man or material nature. The poet deals with the bodiless forms of air, of fancy lighter than air. His business is contemplative, the other's is active, and depends for its success on strong moral energy and presence of mind. He must, indeed, have genius of the highest order to effect his own combinations, anticipate the movements of his enemy, and dart with eagle eye on his vulnerable point. But who shall say that this practical genius, if we may so term it, is to rank higher in the scale than the creative power of the poet, the spark from the mind of divinity itself?

The orator might seem to afford better ground for comparison, since, though his theater of action is abroad, he may be said to work with much the same tools as the writer. Yet how much of his success depends on qualities other than intellectual! "Action," said the father of eloquence, "action, action are the three most essential things to an orator." How much depends on the look, the gesture, the magical tones of voice, modulated to the passions he has stirred; and how much on the contagious sympathies of the audience itself, which drown everything like criticism in the overwhelming tide of emotion! If any one would know how much, let him, after patiently standing

"till his feet throb,
And his head thumps, to feed upon the breath
Of patriots bursting with heroic rage,"

read the same speech in the columns of a morning newspaper, or in the well-concocted report of the orator himself. The productions of the writer are subjected to a fiercer ordeal. He has no excited sympathies of numbers to hurry his readers along over his blunders. He is scanned in the

calm silence of the closet. Every flower of fancy seems here to wither under the rude breath of criticism; every link in the chain of argument is subjected to the touch of prying scrutiny, and if there be the least flaw in it, it is sure to be detected. There is no tribunal so stern as the secret tribunal of a man's own closet, far removed from all the sympathetic impulses of humanity. Surely there is no form in which *intellect* can be exhibited to the world so completely stripped of all adventitious aids as the form of written composition. But, says the practical man, let us estimate things by their utility. "You talk of the poems of Homer," said a mathematician, "but, after all, what do they *prove*?" A question which involves an answer somewhat too voluminous for the tail of an article. But if the poems of Homer were, as Heeren asserts, the principal bond which held the Grecian states together, and gave them a national feeling, they "*prove*" more than all the arithmeticians of Greece—and there were many cunning ones in it—ever proved. The results of military skill are indeed obvious. The soldier, by a single victory, enlarges the limits of an empire; he may do more—he may achieve the liberties of a nation, or roll back the tide of barbarism ready to overwhelm them. Wellington was placed in such a position, and nobly did he do his work; or, rather, he was placed at the head of such a gigantic moral and physical apparatus as enabled him to do it. With his own unassisted strength, of course, he could have done nothing. But it is on his own solitary resources that the great writer is to rely. And yet, who shall say that the triumphs of Wellington have been greater than those of Scott, whose works are familiar as household words to every fireside in his own land, from the castle to the cottage; have crossed oceans and deserts and, with healing on their wings, found their way to the remotest regions; have helped to form the character, until his own mind may be said to be incorporated into those of hundreds of thousands of his fellow-men? Who is there that has not,

at some time or other, felt the heaviness of his heart lightened, his pains mitigated, and his bright moments of life made still brighter by the magical touches of his genius? And shall we speak of his victories as less real, less serviceable to humanity, less truly glorious than those of the greatest captain of his day? The triumph of the warrior are bounded by the narrow theater of his own age; but those of a Scott or a Shakspeare will be renewed with greater and greater luster in ages yet unborn, when the victorious chieftain shall be forgotten, or shall live only in the song of the minstrel and the page of the chronicler.

But, after all, this sort of parallel is not very gracious nor very philosophical, and, to say truth, is somewhat foolish. We have been drawn into it by the not random, but very deliberate, and, in our poor judgment, very disparaging estimate by Scott of his own vocation; and, as we have taken the trouble to write it, our readers will excuse us from blotting it out. There is too little ground for the respective parties to stand on for a parallel. As to the pedantic *cui bono* standard, it is impossible to tell the final issues of a single act; how can we then hope to those of a course of action? As for the *honor* of different vocations, there never was a truer sentence than the stale one of Pope—stale now, because it is so true—

“Act well your part—there all the honor lies.”

And it is the just boast of our own country, that in no civilized nation is the force of this philanthropic maxim so nobly illustrated as in ours—thanks to our glorious institutions.

A great cause, probably, of Scott's low estimate of letters was the facility with which he wrote. What costs us little we are apt to prize little. If diamonds were as common as pebbles, and gold-dust as any other, who would stoop to gather them? It was the prostitution of his muse, by-the-by, for this same gold-dust, which brought a sharp rebuke on the poet from Lord Byron, in his “English Bards:”

"For this we spurn Apollo's venal son;"

a coarse cut, and the imputation about as true as most satire, that is, not true at all. This was imputed in his lordship's earlier days, when he most chivalrously disclaimed all purpose of bartering his rhymes for gold. He lived long enough, however, to weigh his literary wares in the same money-balance used by more vulgar manufacturers; and, in truth,* it would be ridiculous if the produce of the brain should not bring its price in this form as well as any other. There is little danger, we imagine, of finding too much gold in the bowels of Parnassus.

Scott took a more sensible view of things. In a letter to Ellis, written soon after the publication of "The Minstrelsy," he observes, "People may say this and that of the pleasure of fame, or of profit, as a motive of writing; I think the only pleasure is in the actual exertion and research, and I would no more write upon any other terms than I would hunt merely to dine upon hare soup. At the same time, if credit and profit came unlooked for, I would no more quarrel with them than with the soup." Even this declaration was somewhat more magnanimous than was warranted by his subsequent conduct. The truth is, he soon found out, especially after the Waverley vein had opened, that he had hit on a gold-mine. The prodigious returns he got gave the whole thing the aspect of a speculation. Every new work was an adventure, and the proceeds naturally suggested the indulgence of the most extravagant schemes of expense, which, in their turn, stimulated him to fresh efforts. In this way the "profits" became, whatever they might have been once, a principal incentive to, as they were the recompense of, exertion. His productions were cash articles, and were estimated by him more on the Hudibrastic rule of "the real worth of a thing" than by any fanciful standard of fame. He bowed with deference to the judgment of the booksellers, and trimmed his sails dexterously as the "aura popularis" shifted. "If it is na weil bobbet," he writes to his printer, on turn-

ing out a less lucky novel, "we'll bobbit again." His muse was of that school who seek the greatest happiness of the greatest number. We can hardly imagine him invoking her like Milton:

"Still govern thou my song,
Urania, and fit audience find, though few."

Still less can we imagine him, like the blind old bard, feeding his soul with visions of posthumous glory, and spinning out epics for five pounds apiece.

It is singular that Scott, although he set as high a money value on his productions as the most enthusiastic of the "trade" could have done, in a literary view should have held them so cheap. "Whatever others may be," he said, "I have never been a partisan of my own poetry; as John Wilkes declared, that, 'in the height of his success, he had himself never been a Wilkite.'" Considering the poet's popularity, this was but an indifferent compliment to the taste of his age. With all this disparagement of his own productions, however, Scott was not insensible to criticism. He says somewhere that, "if he had been conscious of a single vulnerable point in himself, he would not have taken up the business of writing;" but, on another occasion, he writes, "I make it a rule never to read the attacks made upon me;" and Captain Hall remarks, "He never reads the criticisms on his books; this I know, from the most unquestionable authority. Praise, he says, gives him no pleasure, and censure annoys him." Madame de Graffigny says, also, of Voltaire, "that he was altogether indifferent to praise, but the least word from his enemies drove him crazy." Yet both of these authors banqueted on the sweets of panegyric as much as any who ever lived. They were in the condition of an epicure whose palate has lost its relish for the dainty fare in which it has been so long revelling, without becoming less sensible to the annoyances of sharper and coarser flavors. It may afford some consolation to humble mediocrity, to the

less fortunate votaries of the muse, that those who have reached the summit of Parnassus are not much more contented with their condition than those who are scrambling among the bushes at the bottom of the mountain. The fact seems to be, as Scott himself intimates more than once, that the joy is in the chase, whether in the prose or the poetry of life.

But it is high time to terminate our lucubrations, which, however imperfect and unsatisfactory, have already run to a length that must trespass on the patience of the reader. We rise from the perusal of these delightful volumes with the same sort of melancholy feeling with which we wake from a pleasant dream. The concluding volume, of which such ominous presage is given in the last sentence of the fifth, has not yet reached us; but we know enough to anticipate the sad catastrophe it is to unfold of the drama. In those which we have seen, we have beheld a succession of interesting characters come upon the scene and pass away to their long home. "Bright eyes now closed in dust, gay voices forever silenced," seem to haunt us, too, as we write. The imagination reverts to Abbotsford—the romantic and once brilliant Abbotsford—the magical creation of *his* hands. We see its halls radiant with the hospitality of *his* benevolent heart; thronged with pilgrims from every land, assembled to pay homage at the shrine of genius; echoing to the blithe music of those festal holy-days when young and old met to renew the usages of the good old times.

"These were its charms, but all these charms are fled."

Its courts are desolate, or trodden only by the foot of the stranger. The stranger sits under the shadows of the trees which his hand planted. The spell of the enchanter is dissolved; his wand is broken; and the mighty minstrel himself now sleeps in the bosom of the peaceful scenes embellished by his taste, and which his genius has made immortal.

MOLIÈRE.

THE French surpass every other nation, indeed all the other nations of Europe put together, in the amount and excellence of their memoirs. Whence comes this manifest superiority? The important Collection relating to the History of France, commencing as early as the thirteenth century, forms a basis of civil history, more authentic, circumstantial, and satisfactory to an intelligent inquirer than is to be found among any other people; and the multitude of biographies, personal anecdotes, and similar scattered notices, which have appeared in France during the two last centuries, throw a flood of light on the social habits and general civilization of the period in which they were written. The Italian histories (and every considerable city in Italy, says Tiraboschi, had its historian as early as the thirteenth century) are fruitful only in wars, massacres, treasonable conspiracies, or diplomatic intrigues, matters that affect the tranquility of the state. The rich body of Spanish chronicles, which maintain an unbroken succession from the reign of Alphonso the Wise to that of Philip the Second, are scarcely more personal or interesting in their details, unless it be in reference to the sovereign and his immediate court. Even the English, in their memoirs and autobiographies of the last century, are too exclusively confined to topics of public notoriety, as the only subject worthy of record, or which can excite a general interest in their readers. Not so with the French. The most frivolous details assume in their eyes an importance, when they can be made illustrative of an eminent character; and even when they concern one of less note, they become sufficiently in-

teresting, as just pictures of life and manners. Hence, instead of exhibiting their hero only as he appears on the great theater, they carry us along with him into retirement, or into those social circles where, stripped of his masquerade dress, he can indulge in all the natural gayety of his heart—in those frivolities and follies which display the real character much better than all his premeditated wisdom; those little nothings, which make up so much of the sum of French memoirs, but which, however amusing, are apt to be discarded by their more serious English neighbors as something derogatory to their hero. Where shall we find a more lively portraiture of that interesting period, when feudal barbarism began to fade away before the civilized institutions of modern times, than in Philip de Comines' sketches of the courts of France and Burgundy in the latter half of the fifteenth century? Where a more nice development of the fashionable intrigues, the corrupt Machiavelian politics which animated the little coteries, male and female, of Paris, under the regency of Anne of Austria, than in the Memoirs of De Retz? To say nothing of the vast amount of similar contributions in France during the last century, which, in the shape of letters and anecdotes, as well as memoirs, have made us as intimately acquainted with the internal movements of society in Paris, under all its aspects, literary, fashionable, and political, as if they had passed in review before our own eyes.

The French have been remarked for their excellence in narrative ever since the times of the *fabliaux* and the old Norman romances. Somewhat of their success in this way may be imputed to the structure of their language, whose general currency, and whose peculiar fitness for prose composition, have been noticed from a very early period. Brunetto Latini, the master of Dante, wrote his *Tesoro* in French, in preference to his own tongue, as far back as the middle of the thirteenth century, on the ground "that its speech was the most universal and most delectable of all

the dialects of Europe." And Dante asserts in his treatise "on Vulgar Eloquence," that "the superiority of the French consists in its adaptation, by means of its facility and agreeableness, to narratives in prose." Much of the wild, artless grace, the *naïveté*, which characterized it in its infancy, has been gradually polished away by fastidious critics, and can scarcely be said to have survived Marot and Montaigne. But the language has gained considerably in perspicuity, precision, and simplicity of construction, to which the jealous labors of the French Academy must be admitted to have contributed essentially. This simplicity of construction, refusing those complicated inversions so usual in the other languages of the Continent, and its total want of prosody, though fatal to poetical purposes, have greatly facilitated its acquisition to foreigners, and have made it a most suitable vehicle for conversation. Since the time of Louis the Fourteenth, accordingly, it has become the language of the courts, and the popular medium of communication in most of the countries of Europe. Since that period, too, it has acquired a number of elegant phrases and familiar turns of expression, which have admirably fitted it for light, popular narrative, like that which enters into memoirs, letter-writing, and similar kinds of composition.

The character and situation of the writers themselves may account still better for the success of the French in this department. Many of them, as Joinville, Sully, Comines, De Thou, Rochefoucault, Torcy, have been men of rank and education, the counsellors or the friends of princes, acquiring from experience a shrewd perception of the character and of the forms of society. Most of them have been familiarized in those polite circles which, in Paris more than any other capital, seem to combine the love of dissipation and fashion with a high relish for intellectual pursuits. The state of society in France, or, what is the same thing, in Paris, is admirably suited to the purposes of the memoir-writer. The cheerful,

gregarious temper of the inhabitants, which mingles all ranks in the common pursuit of pleasure; the external polish, which scarcely deserts them in the commission of the grossest violence; the influence of the women, during the last two centuries, far superior to that of the sex among any other people, and exercised alike on matters of taste, politics, and letters; the gallantry and licentious intrigues so usual in the higher classes of this gay metropolis, and which fill even the life of a man of letters, so stagnant in every other country, with stirring and romantic adventure; all these, we say, make up a rich and varied panorama, that can hardly fail of interest under the hand of the most common artists.

Lastly, the vanity of the French may be considered as another cause of their success in this kind of writing; a vanity which leads them to disclose a thousand amusing particulars, which the reserve of an Englishman, and perhaps his pride, would discard as altogether unsuitable to the public ear. This vanity, it must be confessed, however, has occasionally seduced their writers, under the garb of confessions and secret memoirs, to make such a disgusting exposure of human infirmity as few men would be willing to admit, even to themselves.

The best memoirs of late produced in France seem to have assumed somewhat of a novel shape. While they are written with the usual freedom and vivacity, they are fortified by a body of references and illustrations that attest an unwonted degree of elaboration and research. Such are those of Rousseau, La Fontaine, and Molière, lately published. The last of these, which forms the subject of our article, is a compilation of all that has ever been recorded of the life of Molière. It is executed in an agreeable manner, and has the merit of examining, with more accuracy than has been hitherto done, certain doubtful points in his biography, and of assembling together in a convenient form what has before been diffused over a great variety of surface. But, however familiar

most of these particulars may be to the countrymen of Molière (by far the greatest comic genius in his own nation, and, in very many respects, inferior to none in any other), they are not so current elsewhere as to lead us to imagine that some account of his life and literary labors would be altogether unacceptable to our readers.

Jean-Baptiste Poquelin (Molière) was born in Paris, January 15, 1622. His father was an upholsterer, as his grandfather had been before him; and the young Poquelin was destined to exercise the same hereditary craft, to which, indeed, he served an apprenticeship until the age of fourteen. In this determination his father was confirmed by the office which he had obtained for himself, in connection with his original vocation, of *valet de chambre* to the king, with the promise of a reversion of it to his son on his own decease. The youth accordingly received only such a meager elementary education as was usual with the artisans of that day. But a secret consciousness of his own powers convinced him that he was destined by nature for higher purposes than that of quilting sofas and hanging tapestry. His occasional presence at the theatrical representations of the *Hôtel de Bourgogne* is said also to have awakened in his mind, at this period, a passion for the drama. He therefore solicited his father to assist him in obtaining more liberal instruction; and when the latter at length yielded to the repeated entreaties of his son, it was with the reluctance of one who imagines that he is spoiling a good mechanic in order to make a poor scholar. He was accordingly introduced into the Jesuits' College of Clermont, where he followed the usual course of study for five years with diligence and credit. He was fortunate enough to pursue the study of philosophy under the direction of the celebrated Gassendi, with his fellow-pupils, Chapelle, the poet, afterward his intimate friend, and Bernier, so famous subsequently for his travels in the East, but who, on his return, had the misfortune to lose the favor of Louis the Fourteenth

by replying to him, that "of all the countries he had ever seen, he preferred Switzerland."

On the completion of his studies in 1641, he was required to accompany the king, then Louis the Thirteenth, in his capacity of *valet de chambre* (his father being detained in Paris by his infirmities), on an excursion to the south of France. This journey afforded him the opportunity of becoming intimately acquainted with the habits of the court, as well as those of the provinces, of which he afterward so repeatedly availed himself in his comedies. On his return he commenced the study of the law, and had completed it, it would appear, when his old passion for the theater revived with increased ardor, and, after some hesitation, he determined no longer to withstand the decided impulse of his genius. He associated himself with one of those city companies of players with which Paris had swarmed since the days of Richelieu—a minister who aspired after the same empire in the republic of letters which he had so long maintained over the state, and whose ostentatious patronage eminently contributed to develop that taste for dramatic exhibition which has distinguished his countrymen ever since.

The consternation of the elder Poquelin, on receiving the intelligence of his son's unexpected determination, may be readily conceived. It blasted at once all the fair promise which the rapid progress the latter had made in his studies justified him in forming, and it degraded him to an unfortunate profession, esteemed at that time even more lightly in France than it had been in other countries. The humiliating dependance of the comedian on the popular favor, the daily exposure of his person to the caprice and insults of an unfeeling audience, the numerous temptations incident to his precarious and unsettled life, may furnish abundant objections to this profession in the mind of every parent. But in France, to all these objections were superadded others of a graver cast, founded on religion. The clergy there, alarmed at the rapidly-increasing taste for dramatic

exhibitions, openly denounced these elegant recreations as an insult to the Deity; and the pious father anticipated, in this preference of his son, his spiritual no less than his temporal perdition. He actually made an earnest remonstrance to him to this effect, through the intervention of one of his friends, who, however, instead of converting the youth, was himself persuaded to join the company then organizing under his direction. But his family were never reconciled to his proceeding; and even at a later period of his life, when his splendid successes in his new career had shown how rightly he had understood the character of his own genius, they never condescended to avail themselves of the freedom of admission to his theater, which he repeatedly proffered. M. Bret, his editor, also informs us, that he had himself seen a genealogical tree in the possession of the descendants of this same family, in which the name of Molière was not even admitted! Unless it were to trace their connection with so illustrious a name, what could such a family want of a genealogical tree! It was from a deference to these scruples that our hero annexed to his patronymic the name of Molière, by which alone he has been recognized by posterity.

During the three following years he continued playing in Paris, until the turbulent regency of Anne of Austria withdrew the attention of the people from the quiet pleasures of the drama to those of civil broil and tumult. Molière then quitted the capital for the south of France. From this period, 1646 to 1658, his history presents few particulars worthy of record. He wandered with his company through the different provinces, writing a few farces which have long since perished, performing at the principal cities, and, wherever he went, by his superior talent withdrawing the crowd from every other spectacle to the exhibition of his own. During this period, too, he was busily storing his mind with those nice observations of men and manners so essential to the success of the dramatist, and which were to ripen there until a

proper time for their development should arrive. At the town of Pezénas they still show an elbow-chair of Molière's (as at Montpellier they show the gown of Rabelais), in which the poet, it is said, ensconced in a corner of a barber's shop, would sit for the hour together, silently watching the air, gestures, and grimaces of the village politicians, who, in those days, before coffee-houses were introduced into France, used to congregate in this place of resort. The fruits of this study may be easily discerned in those original draughts of character from the middling and lower classes with which his pieces everywhere abound.

In the south of France he met with the Prince of Conti, with whom he had contracted a friendship at the college of Clermont, and who received him with great hospitality. The prince pressed upon him the office of his private secretary; but, fortunately for letters, Molière was constant in his devotion to the drama, assigning as his reason that "the occupation was of too serious a complexion to suit his taste; and that, though he might make a passable author, he should make a very poor secretary." Perhaps he was influenced in this refusal, also, by the fate of the preceding incumbent, who had lately died of a fever, in consequence of a blow from the fire-tongs, which his highness, in a fit of ill humor, had given him on the temple. However this may be, it was owing to the good offices of the prince that he obtained access to Monsieur, the only brother of Louis the Fourteenth, and father of the celebrated regent, Philip of Orleans, who, on his return to Paris in 1658, introduced him to the king, before whom, in the month of October following, he was allowed, with his company, to perform a tragedy of Corneille's and one of his own farces.

His little corps was now permitted to establish itself under the title of the "Company of Monsieur," and the theater of the Petit-Bourbon was assigned as the place for its performances. Here, in the course of a few weeks, he brought out his

Etourdi and *Le Dépit Amoureux*, comedies in verse and in five acts, which he had composed during his provincial pilgrimage, and which, although deficient in an artful *liaison* of scenes and in probability of incident, exhibit, particularly the last, those fine touches of the ridiculous, which revealed the future author of the *Tartuffe* and the *Misanthrope*. They indeed found greater favor with the audience than some of his later pieces; for in the former they could only compare him with the wretched models that had preceded him, while in the latter they were to compare him with himself.

In the ensuing year Molière exhibited his celebrated farce of *Les Précieuses Ridicules*; a piece in only one act, but which, by its inimitable satire, effected such a revolution in the literary taste of his countrymen as has been accomplished by few words of a more imposing form, and which may be considered as the basis of the dramatic glory of Molière, and the dawn of good comedy in France. This epoch was the commencement of that brilliant period in French literature which is so well known as the age of Louis the Fourteenth; and yet it was distinguished by such a puerile, meretricious taste, as is rarely to be met with except in the incipient stages of civilization, or in its last decline. The cause of this melancholy perversion of intellect is mainly imputable to the influence of a certain *coterie* of wits, whose rank, talents, and successful authorship had authorized them, in some measure, to set up as the arbiters of taste and fashion. This choice assembly, consisting of the splenetic Rochefoucault; the *belesprit* Voiture; Balzac, whose letters afford the earliest example of numbers in French prose; the lively and licentious Bussy; Rabutin; Chapelain, who, as a wit has observed, might still have had a reputation had it not been for his "Pucelle;" the poet Bensérade; Ménage, and others of less note; together with such eminent women as Madame Lafayette, Mademoiselle Scudéri (whose eternal romances, the delight of her own age, have been the despair of every other), and

even the elegant Sévigné, was accustomed to hold its *réunions* principally at the *Hôtel de Rambouillet*, the residence of the marchioness of that name, and which, from this circumstance, has acquired such ill-omened notoriety in the history of letters.

Here they were wont to hold the most solemn discussions on the most frivolous topics, but especially on matters relating to gallantry and love, which they debated with all the subtlety and metaphysical refinement that centuries before had characterized the romantic Courts of Love in the south of France. All this was conducted in an affected jargon, in which the most common things, instead of being called by their usual names, were signified by ridiculous periphrases; which, while it required neither wit nor ingenuity to invent them, could have had no other merit, even in their own eyes, than that of being unintelligible to the vulgar. To this was superadded a tone of exaggerated sentiment, and a ridiculous code of etiquette, by which the intercourse of these *exclusives* was to be regulated with each other, all borrowed from the absurd romances of Calprenede and Scudéri. Even the names of the parties underwent a metamorphosis, and Madame de Rambouillet's christian name of *Catherine* being found too trite and unpoetical, was converted into *Arthénice*, by which she was so generally recognized as to be designated by it in Fléchier's eloquent funeral oration on her daughter.* These insipid affectations, which French critics are fond of imputing to an Italian influence, savor quite as much of the Spanish *cultismo* as of the *concelli* of the former nation, and may be yet more fairly referred to the same false principles of taste which distinguished the French Pleiades of the sixteenth century, and the more ancient compositions

*How comes La Harpe to fall into the error of supposing that Fléchier referred to Madame Montausier by this epithet of *Arthénice*? The bishop's style in this passage is as unequivocal as usual. See *Cours de Littérature*, etc., tome vi., p. 167.

of their Provençal ancestors. Dictionaries were compiled, and treatises written illustrative of this precious vocabulary; all were desirous of being initiated into the mysteries of so elegant a science: even such men as Corneille and Bossuet did not disdain to frequent the saloons where it was studied; the spirit of imitation, more active in France than in other countries, took possession of the provinces; every village had its coterie of *précieuses* after the fashion of the capital, and a false taste and criticism threatened to infect the very sources of pure and healthful literature.

It was against this fashionable corruption that Molière aimed his wit in the little satire of the "*Précieuses Ridicules*," in which the valets of two noblemen are represented as aping their masters' tone of conversation for the purpose of imposing on two young ladies fresh from the provinces, and great admirers of the new style. The absurdity of these affectations is still more strongly relieved by the contemptuous incredulity of the father and servant, who do not comprehend a word of them. By this process Molière succeeded both in exposing and degrading these absurd pretensions, as he showed how opposite they were to common sense, and how easily they were to be acquired by the most vulgar minds. The success was such as might have been anticipated on an appeal to popular feeling, where nature must always triumph over the arts of affectation. The piece was welcomed with enthusiastic applause, and the disciples of the *Hôtel Rambouillet*, most of whom were present at the first exhibition, beheld the fine fabric which they had been so painfully constructing brought to the ground by a single blow. "And these follies," said Ménage to Chapelain, "which you and I see so finely criticised here, are what we have been so long admiring. We must go home and burn our idols." "Courage, Molière," cried an old man from the pit; "this is genuine comedy." The price of the seats was doubled from the time of the second representation. Nor were the effects of the satire

merely transitory. It converted an epithet of praise into one of reproach; and a *femme précieuse*, a *style précieux*, a *ton précieux*, once so much admired, have ever since been used only to signify the most ridiculous affectation.

There was, in truth, however, quite as much luck as merit in this success of Molière, whose production exhibits no finer raillery or better sustained dialogue than are to be found in many of his subsequent pieces. It assured him, however, of his own strength, and disclosed to him the mode in which he should best hit the popular taste. "I have no occasion to study Plautus or Terence any longer," said he; "I must henceforth study the world." The world, accordingly, was his study; and the exquisite models of character which it furnished him will last as long as it shall endure.

In 1660 he brought out the excellent comedy of the *Ecole des Maris*, and in the course of the same month, that of the *Idem* in three acts—composed, learned, and performed within the brief space of a fortnight; an expedition evincing the dexterity of the manager no less than that of the author. This piece was written at the request of Fouquet, superintendent of finances to Louis the Fourteenth, for the magnificent *fête* at Vaux, given by him to that monarch, and lavishly celebrated in the memoirs of the period, and with yet more elegance in a poetical epistle of La Fontaine to his friend De Maueroix. This minister had been intrusted with the principal care of the finances under Cardinal Mazarine, and had been continued in the same office by Louis the Fourteenth, on his own assumption of the government. The monarch, however, alarmed at the growing dilapidations of the revenue, requested from the superintendent an *exposé* of its actual condition, which, on receiving, he privately communicated to Colbert, the rival and successor of Fouquet. The latter, whose ordinary expenditure far exceeded that of any other subject in the kingdom, and who, in addition to immense sums

occasionally lost at play and daily squandered on his debaucheries, is said to have distributed in pensions more than four millions of livres annually, thought it would be an easy matter to impose on a young and inexperienced prince, who had hitherto shown himself more devoted to pleasure than business, and accordingly gave in false returns, exaggerating the expenses, and diminishing the actual receipts of the treasury. The detection of this peculation determined Louis to take the first occasion of dismissing his powerful minister; but his ruin was precipitated and completed by the discovery of an indiscreet passion for Madame de la Villière, whose fascinating graces were then beginning to acquire for her that ascendancy over the youthful monarch which has since condemned her name to such unfortunate celebrity. The portrait of this lady, seen in the apartments of the favorite on the occasion to which we have adverted, so incensed Louis, that he would have had him arrested on the spot but for the seasonable intervention of the queen-mother, who reminded him that Fouquet was his host. It was for this *fête* at Vaux, whose palace and ample domains, covering the extent of three villages, had cost their proprietor the sum, almost incredible for that period, of eighteen million livres, that Fouquet put in requisition all the various talents of the capital, the dexterity of its artists, and the invention of its finest poets. He was particularly lavish in his preparations for the dramatic portion of the entertainment. Le Brun passed for a while from his victories of Alexander to paint the theatrical decorations; Torelli was employed to contrive the machinery; Pelisson furnished the prologue, much admired in its day, and Molière his comedy of the *Fâcheux*.

This piece, the hint for which may have been suggested by Horace's ninth satire, *Ibam forte viâ Sacerd*, is an amusing caricature of the various *boreds* that infest society, rendered the more vexatious by their intervention at the very moment when a young lover is hastening to the place of

assignation with his mistress. Louis the Fourteenth, after the performance, seeing his master of the hunts near him, M. Soyecour, a personage remarkably absent, and inordinately devoted to the pleasures of the chase, pointed him out to Molière as an original whom he had omitted to bring upon his canvas. The poet took the hint, and the following day produced an excellent scene, where this Nimrod is made to go through the *technics* of his art, in which he had himself, with great complaisance, instructed the mischievous satirist, who had drawn him into a conversation for that very purpose on the preceding evening.

This play was the origin of the *comédie-ballet*, afterward so popular in France. The residence at Vaux brought Molière more intimately in contact with the king and the court than he had before been; and from this time may be dated the particular encouragement which he ever after received from this prince, and which eventually enabled him to triumph over the malice of his enemies. A few days after this magnificent entertainment, Fouquet was thrown into prison, where he was suffered to languish the remainder of his days, "which," says the historian from whom we have gathered these details, "he terminated *in sentiments of the most sincere piety*:"* a termination by no means uncommon in France with that class of persons, of either sex, respectively, who have had the misfortune to survive their fortune or their beauty.

In February, 1662, Molière formed a matrimonial connection with Mademoiselle Béjart, a young comedian of his company, who had been educated under his own eye, and whose wit and captivating graces had effectually ensnared the poet's heart, but for which he was destined to perform doleful penance the remainder of his life. The disparity of their ages, for the lady was

*Histoire de la Vie, etc., de La Fontaine, par M. Valckenacr. Paris, 1824.

hardly seventeen, might have afforded in itself a sufficient objection; and he had no reason to flatter himself that she would remain uninfected by the pernicious example of the society in which she had been educated, and of which he himself was not altogether an immaculate member. In his excellent comedy of the *Ecole des Femmes*, brought forward the same year, the story turns upon the absurdity of an old man's educating a young woman for the purpose, at some future time, of marrying her, which wise plan is defeated by the unseasonable apparition of a young lover, who in five minutes undoes what it had cost the veteran so many years to contrive. The pertinency of this moral to the poet's own situation shows how much easier it is to talk wisely than to act so.

This comedy, popular as it was on its representation, brought upon the head of its author a tempest of parody, satire, and even slander, from those of his own craft who were jealous of his unprecedented success, and from those literary *petits-mâîtres* who still smarted with the stripes inflicted on them in some of his previous performances. One of this latter class, incensed at the applauses bestowed upon the piece on the night of its first representation, indignantly exclaimed, *Ris donc, parterre! ris donc!* "Laugh then, pit, if you will!" and immediately quitted the theater.

Molière was not slow in avenging himself of these interested criticisms, by means of a little piece entitled *La Critique de l'Ecole des Femmes*, in which he brings forward the various objections made to his comedy, and ridicules them with unsparing severity. These objections appear to have been chiefly of a verbal nature. A few such familiar phrases as *Tarte à la crème*, *Enfans par l'oreille*, etc., gave particular offence to the purists of that day, and, in the prudish spirit of French criticism, have since been condemned by Voltaire and La Harpe as unworthy of comedy. One of the personages introduced into the *Critique* is a marquis, who,

when repeatedly interrogated as to the nature of his objections to the comedy, has no other answer to make than by his eternal *Tarte à la crème*. The Duc de Feuillade, a coxcomb of little brains but great pretension, was the person generally supposed to be here intended. The peer, unequal to an encounter of wits with his antagonist, resorted to a coarser remedy. Meeting Molière one day in the gallery at Versailles, he advanced as if to embrace him; a civility which the great lords of that day occasionally condescended to bestow upon their inferiors. As the unsuspecting poet inclined himself to receive the salute, the duke, seizing his head between his hands, rubbed it briskly against the buttons of his coat, repeating, at the same time, *Tarte à la crème, Monsieur, tarte à la crème*. The king, on receiving intelligence of this affront, was highly indignant, and reprimanded the duke with great asperity. He at the same time encouraged Molière to defend himself with his own weapons; a privilege of which he speedily availed himself, in a caustic little satire in one act, entitled *Impromptu de Versailles*. "The marquis," he says in this piece, "is nowadays the droll (*le plaisant*) of the comedy; and as our ancestors always introduced a jester to furnish mirth for the audience, so we must have recourse to some ridiculous marquis to divert them."

It is obvious that Molière could never have maintained this independent attitude if he had not been protected by the royal favor. Indeed, Louis was constant in giving him this protection; and when, soon after this period, the character of Molière was blackened by the vilest imputations, the monarch testified his conviction of his innocence by publicly standing godfather to his child—a tribute of respect equally honorable to the prince and the poet. The king, moreover, granted him a pension of a thousand livres annually; and to his company, which henceforth took the title of "comedians of the king," a pension of seven thousand. Our author received his pension, as one of a long list of men of letters, who experienced a similar

bounty from the royal hand. The curious estimate exhibited in this document of the relative merits of these literary stipendiaries affords a striking evidence that the decrees of contemporaries are not unfrequently to be reversed by posterity. The obsolete Chapelain is there recorded "as the greatest French poet who has ever existed;" in consideration of which, his stipend amounted to three thousand livres, while Boileau's name, for which his satires had already secured an imperishable existence, is not even noticed! It should be added, however, on the authority of Boileau, that Chapelain himself had the principal hand in furnishing this apocryphal scale of merit to the minister.

In the month of September, 1665, Molière produced his *L'Amour Médecin*, *comédie-ballet*, in three acts, which, from the time of its conception to that of its performance, consumed only five days. This piece, although displaying no more than his usual talent for caustic raillery, is remarkable as affording the earliest demonstration of those direct hostilities upon the medical faculty, which he maintained at intervals during the rest of his life, and which he may be truly said to have died in maintaining. In this he followed the example of Montaigne, who, in particular, devotes one of the longest chapters in his work to a *tirade* against the profession, which he enforces by all the ingenuity of his wit, and his usual wealth of illustration. In this, also, Molière was subsequently imitated by Le Sage, as every reader of *Gil Blas* will readily call to mind. Both Montaigne and Le Sage, however, like most other libellers of the healing art, were glad to have recourse to it in the hour of need.

Not so with Molière. His satire seems to have been without affectation. Though an habitual valetudinarian, he relied almost wholly on the temperance of his diet for the re-establishment of his health. "What use do you make of your physician?" said the king to him one day. "We chat together, sire," said the poet; "he gives me his prescriptions; I never follow them, and so I get well."

An ample apology for this infidelity may be found in the state of the profession at that day, whose members affected to disguise a profound ignorance of the true principles of science under a pompous exterior, which, however it might impose upon the vulgar, could only bring them into deserved discredit with the better portion of the community. The physicians of that time are described as parading the streets of Paris on mules, dressed in a long robe and band, holding their conversation in bad Latin, or, if they condescended to employ the vernacular, mixing it up with such a jargon of scholastic phrase and scientific *technics* as to render it perfectly unintelligible to vulgar ears. The following lines, cited by M. Tacheureau, and written in good earnest at the time, seem to hit off most of these peculiarities.

"Affecter un air pédantesque,
Cracher du Grec et du Latin,
Longue perruque, habit grotesque,
De la fourrure et du satin,
Tout cela réuni fait presque
Ce qu'on appelle un médecin."*

In addition to these absurdities, the physicians of that period exposed themselves to still farther derision by the contrariety of their opinions, and the animosity with which they maintained them. The famous consultation in the case of Cardinal Mazarine was well known in its day; one of his four medical attendants affirming the seat of his disorder to be the liver, another the lungs, a third the spleen, and a fourth the mesentery. Molière's raillery, therefore, against empirics, in a profession where mistakes are so easily made, so difficult to be detected, and the only one in which they are irremediable, stands abundantly excused from the censures which have been heaped upon it. Its

*A gait and air somewhat pedantic,
And scarce to spit but Greek or Latin,
A long peruke and habit antic,
Sometimes of fur, sometimes of satin,
Form the receipt by which 'tis showed
How to make doctors *à la mode*.

effects were visible in the reform which, in his own time, it effected in their manners, if in nothing farther. They assumed the dress of men of the world, and gradually adopted the popular forms of communication; an essential step to improvement, since nothing cloaks ignorance and empiricism more effectually with the vulgar than an affected use of learned phrase and a technical vocabulary.

We are now arrived at that period of Molière's career when he composed his *Misanthrope*, a play which some critics have esteemed his masterpiece, and which all concur in admiring as one of the noblest productions of the modern drama. Its literary execution, too, of paramount importance in the eye of a French critic, is more nicely elaborated than in any other of the pieces of Molière, if we except the *Tartuffe*, and its didactic dialogue displays a maturity of thought equal to what is found in the best satires of Boileau. It is the very didactic tone of this comedy, indeed, which, combined with its want of eager, animating interest, made it less popular on its representation than some of his inferior pieces. A circumstance which occurred on the first night of its performance may be worth noticing. In the second scene of the first act, a man of fashion, it is well known, is represented as soliciting the candid opinion of *Alceste* on a sonnet of his own enditing, though he flies into a passion with him, five minutes after, for pronouncing an unfavorable judgment. This sonnet was so artfully constructed by Molière with those dazzling epigrammatic points most captivating to common ears, that the gratified audience were loud in their approbation of what they supposed intended in good faith by the author. How great was their mortification, then, when they heard *Alceste* condemn the whole as puerile, and fairly expose the false principles on which it had been constructed. Such a rebuke must have carried more weight with it than a volume of set dissertation, on the principles of taste.

Rousseau has bitterly inveighed against Molière for exposing to ridicule the hero of his *Misan-*

throe, a high-minded and estimable character. It was told to the Duc de Montausier, well known for his austere virtue, that he was intended as the original of the character. Much offended, he attended a representation of the piece, but on returning, declared that "he dared hardly flatter himself the poet had intended him so great an honor." This fact, as has been well intimated by La Harpe, furnishes the best reply to Rousseau's invective.

The relations in which Molière stood with his wife at the time of the appearance of this comedy gave to the exhibition a painful interest. The levity and extravagance of this lady had for some time transcended even those liberal limits which were conceded at that day by the complaisance of a French husband, and they deeply affected the happiness of the poet. As he one day communicated the subject to his friend Chapelle, the latter strongly urged him to confine her person; a remedy much in vogue then for refractory wives, and one, certainly, if not more efficacious, at least more gallant than the "moderate flagellation" authorized by the English law. He remonstrated on the folly of being longer the dupe of her artifices. "Alas!" said the unfortunate poet to him, "you have never loved!" A separation, however, was at length agreed upon, and it was arranged that, while both parties occupied the same house, they should never meet except at the theater. The respective parts which they performed in this piece corresponded precisely with their respective situations: that of *Célimène*, a fascinating, capricious coquette, insensible to every remonstrance of her lover, and selfishly bent on the gratification of her own appetites; and that of *Alceste*, perfectly sensible of the duplicity of his mistress, whom he vainly hopes to reform, and no less so of the unworthiness of his own passion, from which he vainly hopes to extricate himself. The coincidences are too exact to be considered wholly accidental.

If Molière in his preceding pieces had hit the follies and fashionable absurdities of the age, in the *Tartuffe* he flew at still higher game, the most

odious of all vices, religious hypocrisy. The result showed that his shafts were not shot in the dark. The first three acts of the *Tartuffe*, the only ones then written, made their appearance at the memorable *fêtes* known under the name of "The Pleasures of the Enchanted Isle," given by Louis the Fourteenth at Versailles, in 1664, and of which the inquisitive reader may find a circumstantial narrative in the twenty-fifth chapter of Voltaire's history of that monarch. The only circumstance which can give them a permanent value with posterity is their having been the occasion of the earliest exhibition of this inimitable comedy. Louis the Fourteenth, who, notwithstanding the defects of his education, seems to have had a discriminating perception of literary beauty, was fully sensible of the merits of this production. The *Tartuffes*, however, who were present at the exhibition, deeply stung by the sarcasms of the poet, like the foul birds of night whose recesses have been suddenly invaded by a glare of light, raised a fearful cry against him, until Louis even, whose solicitude for the interests of the Church was nowise impaired by his own personal derelictions, complied with their importunities for imposing a prohibition on the public performance of the play.

It was, however, privately acted in the presence of Monsieur, and afterward of the great Condé. Copies of it were greedily circulated in the societies of Paris; and although their unanimous suffrage was an inadequate compensation to the author for the privations he incurred, it was sufficient to quicken the activity of the false zealots, who, under the mask of piety, assailed him with the grossest libels. One of them even ventured so far as to call upon the king to make a public example of him with fire and fagot; another declared that it would be an offence to the Diety to allow Molière, after such an enormity, "to participate in the sacraments, to be admitted to confession, or even to enter the precincts of a church, considering the anathemas which it had fulminated against the authors of indecent and sacrilegious spectacles!"

Soon after his sentence of prohibition, the king attended the performance of a piece entitled *Scaramouche Hermite*, a piece abounding in passages the most indelicate and profane. "What is the reason," said he, on retiring, to the Prince of Condé, "that the persons so sensibly scandalized at Molière's comedy take no umbrage at this?" "Because," said the prince, "the latter only attacks religion, while the former attacks themselves:" an answer which may remind one of a remark of Bayle in reference to the *Decameron*, which having been placed on the Index on account of its immorality, was, however, allowed to be published in an edition which converted the names of the ecclesiastics into those of laymen: "a concession," says the philosopher, "which shows the priests to have been much more solicitous for the interests of their own order than for those of heaven."

Louis, at length convinced of the interested motives of the enemies of the *Tartuffe*, yielded to the importunities of the public and removed his prohibition of its performance. It accordingly was represented, for the first time in public, in August, 1667, before an overflowing house, extended to its full complement of five acts, but with alterations of the names of the piece, the principal personages in it, and some of its most obnoxious passages. It was entitled *The Impostor*, and its hero was styled *Panulfe*. On the second evening of the performance, however, an interdict arrived from the president of the Parliament against the repetition of the performance, and, as the king had left Paris in order to join his army in Flanders, no immediate redress was to be obtained. It was not until two years later, 1669, that the *Tartuffe*, in its present shape, was finally allowed to proceed unmolested in its representations. It is scarcely necessary to add, that these were attended with the most brilliant success which its author could have anticipated, and to which the intrinsic merits of the piece, and the unmerited persecutions he had undergone, so well entitled him. Forty-four successive repre-

sentations were scarcely sufficient to satisfy the eager curiosity of the public: and his grateful company forced upon Molière a double share of the profits during every repetition of its performance for the remainder of his life. Posterity has confirmed the decision of his contemporaries, and it still remains the most admired comedy of the French theater, and will always remain so, says a native critic, "as long as taste and hypocrites shall endure in France."

We have been thus particular in our history of these transactions, as it affords one of the most interesting examples on record of undeserved persecution with which envy and party spirit have assailed a man of letters. No one of Molière's compositions is determined by a more direct moral aim; nowhere has he stripped the mask from vice with a more intrepid hand; nowhere has he animated his discourses with a more sound and practical piety. It should be added, in justice to the French clergy of that period, that the most eminent prelates at the court acknowledged the merits of this comedy, and were strongly in favor of its representation.

It is generally known that the amusing scene in the first act, where *Dorine* enlarges so eloquently on the good cheer which *Tartuffe* had made in the absence of his host, was suggested to Molière some years previous in Lorraine, by a circumstance which took place at the table of Louis the Fourteenth, whom Molière had accompanied in his capacity of *valet de chambre*. Perefixe, bishop of Rhodéz, entering while the king was at his evening meal, during Lent, was invited by him to follow his example; but the bishop declined on the ground that he was accustomed to eat only once during the days of vigil and fast. The king, observing one of his attendants to smile, inquired of him the reason as soon as the prelate had withdrawn. The latter informed his master that he need be under no apprehensions for the health of the good bishop, as he himself had assisted at his dinner on that day, and then

recounted to him the various dishes which had been served up. The king, who listened with becoming gravity to the narration, uttered an exclamation of "Poor man!" at the specification of each new item, varying the tone of his exclamation in such a manner as to give it a highly comic effect. The humor was not lost upon our poet, who has transported the same ejaculations, with much greater effect, into the above-mentioned scene of his play. The king, who did not at first recognize the source whence he had derived it, on being informed of it, was much pleased, if we may believe M. Taschereau, in finding himself even thus accidentally associated with the work of a man of genius.

In 1668 Molière brought forward his *Avaro*, and in the following year his amusing comedy of the *Bourgeois Gentilhomme*, in which the folly of unequal alliances is successfully ridiculed and exposed. This play was first represented in the presence of the court at Chambord. The king maintained during its performance an inscrutable physiognomy, which made it doubtful what might be his real sentiments respecting it. The same deportment was maintained by him during the evening toward the author, who was in attendance in his capacity of *valet de chambre*. The quick-eyed courtiers, the counts and marquises, who had so often smarted under the lash of the poet, construing this into an expression of royal disapprobation, were loud in their condemnation of him, and a certain duke boldly affirmed "that he was fast sinking into his second childhood, and that, unless some writer soon appeared, French comedy would degenerate into mere Italian farce." The unfortunate poet, unable to catch a single ray of consolation, was greatly depressed during the interval of five days which preceded the second representation of his piece; on returning from which, the monarch assured him that "none of his productions had afforded him greater entertainment, and that, if he had delayed expressing his opinion on the preceding

night, it was from the apprehension that his judgment might have been influenced by the excellence of the acting." Whatever we may think of this exhibition of royal caprice, we must admire the suppleness of the courtiers, one and all of whom straightway expressed their full conviction of the merits of the comedy, and the duke above mentioned added, in particular, that "there was a *vis comica* in all that Molière ever wrote, to which the ancients could furnish no parallel!" What exquisite studies for his pencil must Molière not have found in this precious assembly!

We have already remarked that the profession of a comedian was but lightly esteemed in France at this period. Molière experienced the inconveniences resulting from this circumstance even after his splendid literary career had given him undoubted claims to consideration. Most of our readers, no doubt, are acquainted with the anecdote of Belloc, an agreeable poet of the court, who on hearing one of the servants in the royal household refuse to aid the author of the *Tartuffe* in making the king's bed, courteously requested "the poet to accept his services for that purpose." Madame Campan's anecdote of a similar courtesy on the part of Louis the Fourteenth is also well known, who, when several of these functionaries refused to sit at table with the comedian, kindly invited him to sit down with him, and, calling in some of his principal courtiers, remarked that "he had requested the pleasure of Molière's company at his own table, as it was not thought quite good enough for his officers." This rebuke had the desired effect. However humiliating the reflection may be, that genius should have, at any time, stood in need of such patronage, it is highly honorable to the monarch who could raise himself so far above the prejudices of his age as to confer it.

It was the same unworthy prejudice that had so long excluded Molière from that great object and recompense of a French scholar's ambition,

a seat in the Academy; a body affecting to maintain a jealous watch over the national language and literature, which the author of the *Misanthrope* and the *Tartuffe*, perhaps more than any other individual of his age, had contributed to purify and advance. Sensible of this merit, they at length offered him a place in their assembly, provided he would renounce his profession of a player, and confine himself in future to his literary labors. But the poet replied to his friend Boileau, the bearer of this communication, that "too many individuals of his company depended on his theatrical labors for support to allow him for a moment to think of it;" a reply of infinitely more service to his memory than all the academic honors that could have been heaped upon him. This illustrious body, however, a century after his decease, paid him the barren compliment (the only one then in their power) of decreeing to him an *éloge*, and of admitting his bust within their walls, with this inscription upon it:

"Nothing is wanting to his glory: he was wanting to ours."

The catalogue of Academicians contemporary with Molière, most of whom now rest in sweet oblivion, or, with Cotin and Chapelain, live only in the satires of Boileau, shows that it is as little in the power of academies to confer immortality on a writer as to deprive him of it.

We have not time to notice the excellent comedy of the *Femmes Savantes*, and some inferior pieces, written by our author at a later period of his life, and must hasten to the closing scene. He had been long affected by a pulmonary complaint, and it was only by severe temperance, as we have before stated, that he was enabled to preserve even a moderate degree of health. At the commencement of the year 1673, his malady sensibly increased. At this very season he composed his *Malade Imaginaire*—the most whimsical, and, perhaps, the most amusing of the compositions in which he has indulged his raillery against the faculty. On the seventeenth of February,

being the day appointed for its fourth representation, his friends would have dissuaded him from appearing in consequence of his increasing indisposition; but he persisted in his design, alleging "that more than fifty poor individuals depended for their daily bread on its performance." His life fell a sacrifice to his benevolence. The exertions which he was compelled to make in playing the principal part of *Argan* aggravated his distemper, and as he was repeating the word *juro* in the concluding ceremony, he fell into a convulsion, which he vainly endeavored to disguise from the spectators under a forced smile. He was immediately carried to his house in the *Rue de Richelieu*, now No. 34. A violent fit of coughing, on his arrival, occasioned the rupture of a blood-vessel; and seeing his end approaching, he sent for two ecclesiastics of the parish of St. Eustace, to which he belonged, to administer to him the last offices of religion. But these worthy persons refused their assistance; and before a third, who had been sent for, could arrive, Molière, suffocated with the effusion of blood, had expired in the arms of his family.

Harlay de Champvalon, at that time archbishop of Paris, refused the rites of sepulture to the deceased poet because he was a comedian, and had had the misfortune to die without receiving the sacraments. This prelate is conspicuous, even in the chronicles of that period, for his bold and infamous debaucheries. It is of him that Madame de Sévigné observes, in one of her letters: "There are two little inconveniences which make it difficult for any one to undertake his funeral oration—his life and his death." Father Gaillard, who at length consented to undertake it, did so on the condition that he should not be required to say anything of the character of the deceased. The remonstrance of Louis the Fourteenth having induced this person to remove his interdict, he privately instructed the curate of St. Eustace not to allow the usual service for the dead to be recited at the interment. On the day appointed for this

ceremony, a number of the rabble assembled before the deceased poet's door, determined to oppose it. "They knew only," says Voltaire, "that Molière was a comedian, but did not know that he was a philosopher and a great man." They had, more probably, been collected together by the Tartuffes, his unforgiving enemies. The widow of the poet appeased these wretches by throwing money to them from the windows. In the evening, the body, escorted by a procession of about a hundred individuals, the friends and intimate acquaintances of the deceased poet, each of them bearing a flambeau in his hand, was quietly deposited in the cemetery of St. Joseph, without the ordinary chant, or service of any kind. It was not thus that Paris followed to the tomb the remains of her late distinguished comedian, Talma. Yet Talma was only a comedian, while Molière, in addition to this, had the merit of being the most eminent comic writer whom France had ever produced. The different degree of popular civilization which this difference of conduct indicates may afford a subject of contemplation by no means unpleasing to the philanthropist.

In the year 1792, during that memorable period in France when an affectation of reverence for their illustrious dead was strangely mingled with the persecution of the living, the Parisians resolved to exhume the remains of La Fontaine and Molière, in order to transport them to a more honorable place of interment. Of the relics thus obtained, it is certain that no portion belonged to La Fontaine, and it is extremely probable that none did to Molière. Whosoever they may have been, they did not receive the honors for which their repose had been disturbed. With the usual fickleness of the period, they were shamefully transferred from one place to another, or abandoned to neglect for seven years, when the patriotic conservator of the *Monumens Français* succeeded in obtaining them for his collection at the *Petits Augustins*. On the suppression of

this institution in 1817, the supposed ashes of the two poets were, for the last time, transported to the spacious cemetery of *Père de la Chaise*, where the tomb of the author of the *Tartuffe* is designated by an inscription in Latin, which, as if to complete the scandal of the proceedings, is grossly mistaken in the only fact which it pretends to record, namely, the age of the poet at the time of his decease.

Molière died soon after entering upon his fifty-second year. He is represented to have been somewhat above the middle stature, and well proportioned; his features large, his complexion dark, and his black, bushy eyebrows so flexible as to admit of his giving an infinitely comic expression to his physiognomy. He was the best actor of his own generation, and, by his counsels, formed the celebrated Baron, the best of the succeeding. He played all the range of his own characters, from *Alceste* to *Sganarelle*, though he seems to have been peculiarly fitted for broad comedy. He composed with rapidity, for which Boileau has happily complimented him:

“Rare et sublimé esprit, dont la fertile vein
Ignore en écrivant le travail et la peine.”

Unlike in this to Boileau himself, and to Racine, the former of whom taught the latter, if we may credit his son, “the art of rhyming with difficulty.” Of course, the verses of Molière have neither the correctness nor the high finish of those of his two illustrious rivals.

He produced all his pieces, amounting to thirty, in the short space of fifteen years. He was in the habit of reading these to an old female domestic by the name of La Forêt, on whose unsophisticated judgment he greatly relied. On one occasion, when he attempted to impose upon her the production of a brother author, she plainly told him that he had never written it. Sir Walter Scott may have had this habit of Molière’s in his mind when he introduced a similar expedient into his “Chronicles of the Canongate.”

For the same reason, our poet used to request the comedians to bring their children with them when he recited a new play. The peculiar advantage of this humble criticism in dramatic compositions is obvious. Alfieri himself, as he informs us, did not disdain to resort to it.

Molière's income was very ample, probably not less than twenty-five or thirty thousand francs—an immense sum for that day—yet he left but little property. The expensive habits of his wife and his own liberality may account for it. One example of this is worth recording, as having been singularly opportune and well directed. When Racine came up to Paris as a young adventurer, he presented to Molière a copy of his first crude tragedy, long since buried in oblivion. The latter discerned in it, amid all its imperfections, the latent spark of dramatic genius, and he encouraged its author by the present of a hundred Louis. This was doing better for him than Corneille did, who advised the future author of *Phédre* to abandon the tragic walk, and to devote himself altogether to comedy. Racine recompensed this benefaction of his friend, at a later period of his life, by quarreling with him.

Molière was naturally of a reserved and taciturn temper, inasmuch that his friend Boileau used to call him the *Contemplateur*. Strangers who had expected to recognize in his conversation the sallies of wit which distinguished his dramas, went away disappointed. The same thing is related of *La Fontaine*. The truth is, that Molière went into society as a spectator, not as an actor; he found there the studies for the characters which he was to transport upon the stage, and he occupied himself with observing them. The dreamer, *La Fontaine*, lived, too, in a world of his own creation. His friend, *Madam de la Sablière*, paid to him this untranslatable compliment: “*En vérité, mon cher La Fontaine, vous seriez bien bête, si vous n’aviez pas tant d’esprit.*” These unseasonable reveries brought him, it may be imagined, into many whimsical adventures. The great Corneille, too, was

distinguished by the same apathy. A gentleman dined at the same table with him for six months without suspecting the author of the "Cid."

The literary reputation of Molière, and his amiable personal endowments, naturally led him into an intimacy with the most eminent wits of the golden age in which he lived, but especially with Boileau, La Fontaine, and Racine; and the confidential intercourse of these great minds, and their frequent *réunions* for the purposes of social pleasure, bring to mind the similar associations at *the Mermaid's*, *Will's Coffee-House*, and *Button's* which form so pleasing a picture in the annals of English literature. It was common on these occasions to have a volume of the unfortunate Chapelain's epic, then in popular repute, lie open upon the table, and if one of the party fell into a grammatical blunder, to impose upon him the reading of some fifteen or twenty verses of it: "a whole page," says Louis Racine, "was sentence of death." La Fontaine, in his *Psyché*, has painted his reminiscences of these happy meetings in the coloring of fond regret; where, "freely discussing such topics of literature or personal gossip as might arise, they touched lightly upon all, like bees passing on from flower to flower, criticising the works of others without envy, and of one another, when any one chanced to fall into the malady of the age, with frankness." Alas! that so rare a union of minds, destined to live together through all ages, should have been dissolved by the petty jealousies incident to common men.

In these assemblies frequent mention is made of Chapelle, the most intimate friend of Molière, whose agreeable verses are read with pleasure in our day, and whose cordial manners and sprightly conversation made him the delight of his own. His mercurial spirits, however, led him into too free an indulgence of convivial pleasures, and brought upon him the repeated, though unavailing remonstrances of his friends. On one of these occasions, as Boileau was urging upon him the impropriety of this indulgence, and its inevitable consequences,

Chapelle, who received the admonition with great contrition, invited his Mentor to withdraw from the public street in which they were then walking into a neighboring house, where they could talk over the matter with less interruption. Here wine was called for, and, in the warmth of discussion, a second bottle being soon followed by a third, both parties at length found themselves in a condition which made it advisable to adjourn the lecture to a more fitting occasion.

Molière enjoyed also the closest intimacy with the great Condé, the most distinguished ornament of the court of Louis the Fourteenth; to such an extent, indeed, that the latter directed that the poet should never be refused admission to him, at whatever hour he might choose to pay his visit. His regard for his friend was testified by his remark, rather more candid than courteous, to an abbé of his acquaintance, who had brought him an epitaph of his own writing upon the deceased poet. "Would to Heaven," said the prince, "that he were in a condition to bring me yours!"

We have already wandered beyond the limits which we had assigned to ourselves for an abstract of Molière's literary labors, and of the most interesting anecdotes in his biography. Without entering, therefore, into a criticism on his writings, of which the public stand in no need, we shall dismiss the subject with a few brief reflections on their probable influence, and on the design of the author in producing them.

The most distinguished French critics, with the overweening partiality in favor of their own nation, so natural and so universal, placing Molière by common consent at the head of their own comic writers, have also claimed for him a preëminence over those of every other age and country. A. W. Schlegel, a very competent judge in these matters, has degraded him, on the other hand, from the walks of high comedy to the writer of "buffoon farces, for which his genius and inclination seem to have essentially fitted him;" adding, moreover, that "his characters are not drawn from nature,

but from the fleeting and superficial forms of fashionable life." This is a hard sentence, accommodated to the more forcible illustration of the peculiar theory which the German writer has avowed throughout his work, and which, however reasonable in its first principles, has led him into as exaggerated an admiration of the romantic models which he prefers, as disparagement of the classical school which he detests. It is a sentence, moreover, upon which some eminent critics in his own country, who support his theory in the main, have taken the liberty to demur.

That a large proportion of Molière's pieces are conceived in a vein of broad, homely merriment, rather than in that of elevated comedy, abounding in forced situations, high caricature, and practical jokes; in the knavish, intriguing valets of Plautus and Terence; in a compound of that good-nature and irritability, shrewdness and credulity, which make up the dupes of Aristophanes, is very true; but that a writer, distinguished by his deep reflection, his pure taste, and nice observation of character, should have preferred this to the higher walks of his art, is absolutely incredible. He has furnished the best justification of himself in an apology, which a contemporary biographer reports him to have made to some one who censured him on this very ground: "If I wrote simply for fame," said he, "I should manage very differently; but I write for the support of my company. I must not address myself, therefore, to a few people of education, but to the mob. And this latter class of gentry take very little interest in a continued elevation of style and sentiment." With all these imperfections and lively absurdities, however, there is scarcely one of Molière's minor pieces which does not present us with traits of character that come home to every heart, and felicities of expression that, from their truth, have come to be proverbial.

With regard to the objection that his characters are not so much drawn from nature as from the local manners of the age, if it be meant that they

are not acted upon by those deep passions which engross the whole soul, and which, from its intensity, have more of a tragic than a comic import in them, but are rather drawn from the foibles and follies of ordinary life, it is true; but then these last are likely to be quite as permanent, and, among civilized nations, quite as universal as the former. And who has exposed them with greater freedom, or with a more potent ridicule than Molière? Love, under all its thousand circumstances, its quarrels, and reconciliations; vanity, humbly suing for admiration under the guise of modesty; whimsical contradiction of profession and habitual practice; the industry with which the lower classes ape, not the virtues, but the follies of their superiors; the affectation of fashion, taste, science, or anything but what the party actually possesses; the *esprit de corps*, which leads us to feel an exalted respect for our own profession, and a sovereign contempt for every other; the friendly adviser, who has an eye to his own interest; the author, who seeks your candid opinion, and quarrels with you when you have given it; the fair friend, who kindly sacrifices your reputation for a jest; the hypocrite, under every aspect, who deceives the world or himself—these form the various motley panorama of character which Molière has transferred to his canvas, and which, though mostly drawn from cultivated life, must endure as long as society shall hold together.

Indeed, Molière seems to have possessed all the essential requisites for excelling in genteel comedy: a pure taste, an acute perception of the ridiculous, the tone of elegant dialogue, and a wit brilliant and untiring as Congreve's, but which, instead of wasting itself like his, in idle flashes of merriment, is uniformly directed with a moral or philosophical aim. This obvious didactic purpose, in truth, has been censured as inconsistent with the spirit of the drama, and as belonging rather to satire; but it secured to him an influence over the literature and the opinions of his own generation which has been possessed by no other comic writer of the moderns.

He was the first to recall his countrymen from the vapid hyperbole and puerile conceits of the ancient farces, and to instruct them in the maxim which Boileau has since condensed into a memorable verse, that "nothing is beautiful but what is natural." We have already spoken of the reformation which one of his early pieces effected in the admirers of the *Hôtel de Rambouillet* and its absurdities; and when this confederacy afterward rallied under an affectation of science, as it had before done of letters, he again broke it with his admirable satire of the *Femmes Savantes*. We do not recollect any similar revolution effected by a single effort of genius, unless it be that brought about by the *Baviad* and *Mæviad*. But Mr. Gifford, in the Della-Cruscan school, but "broke a butterfly upon the wheel," in comparison with those enemies, formidable by rank and talent, whom Molière assailed. We have noticed, in its proper place, the influence which his writings had in compelling the medical faculty of his day to lay aside the affected deportment, technical jargon, and other mummeries then in vogue, by means of the public derision to which he had deservedly exposed them. In the same manner, he so successfully ridiculed the miserable dialectics, pedantry, and intolerance of the schoolmen, in his diverting dialogues between *Dr. Marphurius* and *Dr. Pancrace*, that he is said to have completely defeated the serious efforts of the University for obtaining a confirmation of the decree of 1624, which had actually prohibited, *under pain of death*, the promulgation of any opinion contrary to the doctrines of Aristotle. The *arrêt burlesque* of his friend Boileau, at a later period, if we may trust the *Menagiana*, had a principal share in preventing a decree of the Parliament against the philosophy of Descartes. It is difficult to estimate the influence of our poet's satire on the state of society in general, and on those higher ranks in particular whose affectations and pretensions he assailed with such pertinacious hostility. If he did not reform them, he at least deprived them of their fascination

and much of their mischievous influence, by holding them up to the contempt and laughter of the public. Sometimes, it must be admitted, though very rarely, in effecting this object, he so far transgressed the bounds of decorum as to descend even to personalities.

From this view of the didactic purpose proposed by Molière in his comedies, it is obviously difficult to institute a comparison between them and those of our English dramatists, or, rather, of Shakspeare, who may be taken as their representative. The latter seems to have had no higher end in view than mere amusement; he took a leaf out of the great volume of human nature as he might find it; nor did he accommodate it to the illustration of any moral or literary theorem. The former, on the other hand, manifests such a direct perceptive purpose as to give to some of his pieces the appearance of satires rather than of comedies; argument takes place of action, and the *pro* and *con* of the matter are discussed with all the formality of a school exercise. This essentially diminishes the interest of some of his best plays, the *Misanthrope* and the *Femmes Savantes*, for example, which for this reason seem better fitted for the closet than the stage, and have long since ceased to be favorites with the public. This want of interest is, moreover, aggravated by the barrenness of action visible in many of Molière's comedies, where he seems only to have sought an apology for bringing together his *coteries* of gentlemen and ladies for the purpose of exhibiting their gladiatorial dexterity in conversation. Not so with the English dramatist, whose boundless invention crowds his scene with incidents that hurry us along with breathless interest, but which sadly scandalize the lover of the unities.

In conformity with his general plan, too, Shakspeare brings before us every variety of situation—the court, the camp, and the cloister; the busy hum of populous cities, or the wild solitude of the forest—presenting us with pictures of rich and romantic beauty, which could not fall within the

scope of his rival, and allowing himself to indulge in the unbounded revelry of an imagination which Molière did not possess. The latter, on the other hand an attentive observer of man as he is found in an over-refined state of society, in courts and crowded capitals, copied his minutest lineaments with a precision that gives to his most general sketches the air almost of personal portraits; seasoning, moreover, his discourses with shrewd hints and maxims of worldly policy. Shakspeare's genius led him rather to deal in bold touches than in this nice delineation. He describes classes rather than individuals; he touches the springs of the most intense passions. The daring of ambition, the craving of revenge, the deep tenderness of love, are all materials in his hands for comedy, and this gives to some of his admired pieces—his "Merchant of Venice" and his "Measure for Measure," for example—a solemnity of coloring that leaves them only to be distinguished from tragedy by their more fortunate termination. Molière, on the contrary, sedulously excludes from his plays whatever can impair their comic interest. And when, as he has done very rarely, he aims directly at vice instead of folly (in the *Tartuffe* for instance), he studies to exhibit it under such ludicrous points of view as shall excite the derision rather than the indignation of his audience.

But whatever be the comparative merits of these great masters, each must be allowed to have attained complete success in his way. Comedy, in the hands of Shakspeare, exhibits to us man, not only as he is moved by the petty vanities of life, but by deep and tumultuous passion; in situations which it requires all the invention of the poet to devise and the richest coloring of eloquence to depict. But if the object of comedy, as has been said, be "to correct the follies of the age, by exposing them to ridicule," who then has equalled Molière?



ITALIAN NARRATIVE POETRY.*

THE characteristics of an Italian school are nowhere so discernible in English literary history as under the reign of Elizabeth. At the period when England was most strenuous in breaking off her spiritual relations with Italy, she cultivated most closely her intellectual. It is hardly necessary to name either the contemporary dramatists, or Surrey, Sidney, and Spenser, the former of whom derived the plots of many of their most popular plays, as the latter did the forms, and frequently the spirit of their poetical compositions, from Italian models. The translations of the same period were, in several instances, superior to any which have been since produced. Harrington's version of the "*Orlando Furioso*," with all its inaccuracy, is far superior to the cumbrous monotony of Hoole. Of Fairfax, the elegant translator of Tasso, it is enough to say that he is styled by Dryden "the poetical father of Waller," and quoted by him, in conjunction with Spenser, as "one of the great masters in our language." The popularity of the Italian was so great even in Ascham's day, who did not survive the first half of Elizabeth's reign, as to draw from the learned schoolmaster much peevish animadversion upon what he terms "the enchantments of Circe, fond books of late translated out of Italian into English, and sold in every shop in London." It gradually lost this wide authority during the succeeding

* 1. "*The Orlando Innamorato*; translated into prose and verse, from the Italian of Francesco Berni. By W. S. Rose." 8vo, p. 279. London, 1823.

2. "*The Orlando Furioso*; translated into verse from the Italian of Ludovico Ariosto. By W. S. Rose." Vol. i., 8vo. London, 1823.

century. This was but natural. Before the time of Elizabeth, all the light of learning which fell upon the world had come from Italy, and our own literature, like a young and tender plant, insensibly put forth its branches most luxuriantly in the direction whence it felt this invigorating influence. As it grew in years and hardihood, it sent its fibers deeper into its own soil, and drew thence the nourishment which enabled it to assume its fair and full proportions. Milton, it is true, the brightest name on the poetical records of that period, cultivated it with eminent success. Any one acquainted with the writings of Dante, Pulci, and Tasso, will understand the value and the extent of Milton's obligations to the Italian. He was far from desiring to conceal them, and he has paid many a tribute "of melodious verse" to the sources from which he drew so much of the nourishment of his exalted genius. "To imitate, as he has done," in the language of Boileau, "is not to act the part of a plagiarist, but of a rival." Milton is, moreover, one of the few writers who have succeeded so far in comprehending the niceties of foreign tongue as to be able to add something to its poetical wealth, and his Italian sonnets are written with such purity as to have obtained commendations from the Tuscan critics.*

Boileau, who set the current of French taste at this period, had a considerable contempt for that of his neighbors. He pointed one of his anti-theetical couplets at the "tinsel of Tasso" ("*clinquant du Tasse*"†), and in another he ridiculed the idea of epics, in which "the devil was always blustering against the heavens."‡ The English admitted the sarcasm of Boileau with the cold

*Milton, in his treatise on *The Reason of Church Government*, alludes modestly enough to his Italian pieces, and the commendations bestowed upon them. "Other things, which I had shifted in scarcity of books and conveniences to hatch up among them, were received with written encomiums, which the Italian is not forward to bestow on men of this side the Alps."

†Satire IX.

‡L'Art Poétique, c. III.

commentary of Addison;* and the "*clinquant du Tasse*" became a cant term of reproach upon the whole body of Italian letters. The French went still farther, and afterward, applying the sarcasm of their critic to Milton as well as to Tasso, rejected both the poets upon the same principles. The French did the English as much justice as they did the Italians. No great change of opinion in this matter took place in England during the last century. The Wartons and Gray had a just estimation of this beautiful tongue, but Dr. Johnson, the dominant critic of that day, seems to have understood the language but imperfectly, and not to have much relished in it what he understood.

In the present age of intellectual activity, attention is so generally bestowed on all modern languages which are ennobled by literature, that it is not singular an acquaintance with the Italian in particular should be widely diffused. Great praise, however, is due to the labors of Mr. Roscoe. There can be little doubt that his elaborate biographies of the Medici, which contain as much literary criticism as historical narrative, have mainly contributed to the promotion of these studies among his countrymen. These works have of late met with much flippant criticism in some of their leading journals. In Italy they have been translated, are now cited as authorities, and have received the most encomiastic notices from several eminent scholars. These facts afford conclusive testimony of their merits. The name of Mathias is well known to every lover of the Italian tongue; his poetical productions rank with those of Milton in merit and far exceed them in quantity. To conclude, it is not many years since Cary gave to his countrymen his very extraordinary version of the father of Tuscan poetry, and Rose is now swelling the catalogue with translations of the two most distinguished chivalrous epics of Italy.

Epic romance has continued to be a great favor-

*Spectator, No. VI.

ite in that country, ever since its first introduction into the polished circles of Florence and Ferrara, toward the close of the fifteenth century. It has held much the same rank in its ornamental literature which the drama once enjoyed in the English, and which historical novel-writing maintains now. It hardly seems credible that an enlightened people should long continue to take great satisfaction in poems founded on the same extravagant fictions, and spun out to the appalling length of twenty, thirty, nay, forty cantos of a thousand verses each. But the Italians, like most Southern nations, delight exceedingly in the uncontrolled play of the imagination, and they abandon themselves to all its brilliant illusions, with no other object in view than mere recreation. An Englishman looks for a moral, or, at least, for some sort of instruction, from the wildest work of fiction. But an Italian goes to it as he would go to the opera—to get impressions rather than ideas. He is extremely sensible to the fine tones of his native language, and, under the combined influence produced by the coloring of a lavish fancy and the music of a voluptuous versification, he seldom stoops to a cold analysis of its purpose or its probability.

Romantic fiction, however, which flourished so exuberantly under a warm southern sky, was transplanted from the colder regions of Normandy and England. It is remarkable that both these countries, in which it had its origin, should have ceased to cultivate it at the very period when the perfection of their respective languages would have enabled them to do so with entire success. We believe this remark requires no qualification in regard to France. Spenser affords one illustrious exception among the English.*

*The *influence*, however, of the old Norman romances may be discovered in the productions of a much later period. Their incredible length required them to be broken up into *fyttles*, or cantos, by the minstrel, who recited them with the accompaniment of a harp, in the same manner as the epics of Homer, broken into *rhapsodies*, were chanted

It was not until long after the extinction of this species of writing in the North that it reappeared in Italy. The commercial habits, and the republican institutions of the Italians in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, were most unfavorable to the spirit of chivalry, and, consequently, to the fables which grew out of it. The three patriarchs of their literature, moreover, by the light which, in this dark period, they throw over other walks of imagination, turned the attention of their countrymen from those of romance. Dante, indeed, who resembled Milton in so many other particulars, showed a similar predilection for the ancient tales of chivalry. His *Commedia* contains several encomiastic allusions to them, but, like the English bard, he contented himself with these, and chose a subject better suited to his ambitious genius and inflexible temper.* His poem, it is true, was of too eccentric a character to be widely imitated,† and both Boccaccio and Petrarch, with

by the bards of Ionia. The minstrel who could thus beguile the tedium of a winter's evening was a welcome guest at the baronial castle and in the hall of the monastery. As Greek and Roman letters were revived, the legends of chivalry fell into disrepute, and the minstrel gradually retreated to the cottage of the peasant, who was still rude enough to relish his simple melody. But the long romance was beyond the comprehension or the taste of the rustic. It therefore gave way to less complicated narratives, and from its wreck may be fairly said to have arisen those Border songs and ballads which form the most beautiful collection of rural minstrelsy that belongs to any age or country.

*Milton's poetry abounds in references to the subjects of romantic fable; and in his "*Epitaphium Damonis*," he plainly intimates his intention of writing an epic on the story of Arthur. It may be doubted whether he would have succeeded on such a topic. His austere character would seem to have been better fitted to feel the impulses of religious enthusiasm than those of chivalry; and England has no reason to regret that her most sublime poet was reserved for the age of Cromwell instead of the romantic reign of Elizabeth.

†The best imitation of the "*Divina Commedia*" is probably the "*Cantata in morte di Ugo Basville*," by the most eminent of the living Italian poets, Monti. His talent for vigorous delineation by a single *coup de pinceau* is eminently *Dantesque*, and the plan of his poem is the exact coun-

less talent, had a more extensive influence over the taste of their nation. The garrulous graces of the former and the lyrical finish of the latter are still solicited in the lighter compositions of Italy. Lastly, the discoveries of ancient manuscripts at home, and the introduction of others from Constantinople, when that rich depository of Grecian science fell into the hands of the barbarian, gave a new direction to the intellectual enterprise of Italian scholars, and withdrew them almost wholly from the farther cultivation of their infant literature.

Owing to these circumstances, the introduction of the chivalrous epoque was protracted to the close of the fifteenth century, when its first successful specimens were produced at the accomplished court of the Medici. The encouragement extended by this illustrious family to every branch of intellectual culture has been too often the subject of encomium to require from us any particular animadversion. Lorenzo, especially, by uniting in his own person the scholarship and talent which he so liberally rewarded in others, contributed more than all to the effectual promotion of an enlightened taste among his countrymen. Even his amusements were subservient to it, and the national literature may be fairly said, at this day, to retain somewhat of the character communicated to it by his elegant recreations. His delicious villas at Piesole and Cajano are celebrated by the scholar, who, in the silence of their shades, pursued with him the studies of his favorite philosophy and of poetry. Even the sensual pleasures of the banquet were relieved by the inventions of wit and fancy. Lyrical composition, which, notwithstanding its peculiar adaptation to the flexible movements of the Italian tongue, had fallen into neglect, was revived, and, together with the

terpart of that of the "*Inferno*." Instead of a mortal descending into the regions of the damned, one of their number (the spirit of Basville, a Frenchman) is summoned back to the earth, to behold the crimes and miseries of his native country during the period of the Revolution.

first eloquent productions of the romantic muse, was recited at the table of Lorenzo.

Of the guests who frequented it, Pulci and Politian are the names most distinguished, and the only ones connected with our present subject. The latter of these was received into the family of Lorenzo as the preceptor of his children, an office for which he seems to have been better qualified by his extraordinary attainments than by his disposition. Whatever may have been the asperity of his temper, however, his poetical compositions breathe the perfect spirit of harmony. The most remarkable of these, distinguished as the "Verses of Politian" (*Stanze di Poliziano*), is a brief fragment of an epic whose purpose was to celebrate the achievements of Julian de Medici, a younger brother of Lorenzo, at a tournament exhibited at Florence in 1468. This would appear but a meager basis for the structure of a great poem. Politian, however, probably in consequence of the untimely death of Julian, his hero, abandoned it in the middle of the second canto, even before he had reached the event which was to constitute the subject of his story.

The incidents of the poem thus abruptly terminated are of no great account. We have a portrait of Julian, a hunting expedition, a love adventure, a digression into the island of Venus, which takes up about half the canto, and a vision of the hero, which ends just as the tournament, the subject of the piece, is about to begin, and with it, like the "fabric of a vision," ends the poem also. In this short space, however, the poet has concentrated all the beauties of his art, the melody of a musical ear, and the inventions of a plastic fancy. His island of love, in particular, is emblazoned with those gorgeous splendors, which have since been borrowed for the enchanted gardens of Alcina, Armida, and Acrasia.

But this little fragment is not recommended, at least to an English reader, so much by its Oriental pomp of imagery as by its more quiet and delicate pictures of external nature. Brilliancy of imag-

ination is the birthright of the Italian poet, as much as a sober, contemplative vein is of the English. This is the characteristic of almost all their best and most popular poetry during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The two great poets of the fourteenth approach much nearer to the English character. Dante shows not only deeper reflection than is common with his countrymen, but in parts of his work, in the *Purgatorio* more especially, manifests a sincere relish for natural beauty, by his most accurate pictures of rural objects and scenery. Petrarch cherished the recollections of an unfortunate passion, until, we may say, without any mystical perversion of language, it became a part of his intellectual existence.* This gave a tender and melancholy expression to his poems, more partic-

*Whatever may be thought of the speculations of the Abbé de Sade, no doubt can be entertained of the substantial existence of Laura, or of Petrarch's passion for her. Indeed, independently of the internal evidence afforded by his poetry, such direct notices of his mistress are scattered through his "Letters" and serious prose compositions, that it is singular there should ever have existed a skepticism on these points. Ugo Foscolo, the well-known author of "*Jacopo Ortis*," has lately published an octavo volume, entitled "*Essays on Petrarch*." Among other particulars, showing the unbounded influence that Laura de Sade obtained over the mind of her poetical lover, he quotes the following memorandum, made by Petrarch two months after her decease, in his private manuscript copy of Virgil, now preserved in the Ambrosian library at Milan:

"It was in the early days of my youth, on the sixth of April, in the morning, and in the year 1327, that Laura, distinguished by her own virtues, and celebrated in my verses, first blessed my eyes in the Church of Santa Clara, at Avignon; and it was in the same city, on the sixth of the very same month of April, at the very same hour in the morning, in the year 1348, that this bright luminary was withdrawn from our sight, when I was at Verona, alas! ignorant of my calamity. The remains of her chaste and beautiful body were deposited in the Church of the Cordeliers on the evening of the same day. To preserve the afflicting remembrance, I have taken a bitter pleasure in recording it, particularly in this book, which is most frequently before my eyes, in order that nothing in this world may have any farther attraction for me; that this great attachment to life being dissolved, I may, by frequent

ularly to those written after the death of Laura, quite as much English as Italian. Love furnishes the great theme and impulse to the Italian poet. It is not too much to say that all their principal versifiers have written under the inspiration of a real or pretended passion. It is to them what a less showy and less exclusive sensibility is to an Englishman. The latter acknowledges the influence of many other affections and relations in life. The death of a friend is far more likely to excite his muse than the smiles or frowns of his mistress. The Italian seldom dwells on melancholy reminiscences, but writes under the impulse of a living and ardent passion. Petrarch did both; but in the poetry which he composed after the death of his mistress, exalted as it is by devotional sentiment, he deviated from the customs of his nation, and adopted an English tone of feeling. A graver spirit of reflection and a deeper sympathy for the unobtrusive beauties of nature are observable in some of their later writers; but these are not primitive elements in the Italian character. Gay, brilliant, imaginative, are the epithets which best indicate the character of their literature during its most flourishing periods; and the poetry of Italy seems to reflect as clearly her unclouded skies and glowing landscape, as that of England does the tranquil and somewhat melancholy complexion of her climate.

The verses of Politian, to return from our digression, contain many descriptions distinguished by the calm, moral beauty of which we have been speaking. Resemblances may be traced between these passages and the writings of some of our best English poets. The descriptive poetry of Gray and of Goldsmith, particularly, exhibits a remarkable coincidence with that of Politian in the enumeration of rural images. The stanza CXXI.,

reflection, and a proper estimation of our transitory existence, be admonished that it is high time for me to think of quitting this earthly Babylon, which I trust it will not be difficult for me, with a strong and manly courage, to accomplish."—P. 35

setting forth the descent of Cupid into the island of Venus, may be cited as having suggested a much admired simile in Gay's popular ballad, *Black-eyed Susan*, since the English verse is almost a metaphrase of the Italian:

"Or poi che ad ail tese ivi perveano,
 Forte le scosse, e già calossi a'piombo,
 Tutto serrato nelle sacre penne,
 Come a suo nido fa lieto colombo."

"So the sweet lark, high poised in air,
 Shuts close his pinions to his breast,
 If chance his mate's shrill call he hear,
 And drops at once into her nest."

These "Stanze" were the first example of a happy cultivation of Italian verse in the fifteenth century. The scholars of that day composed altogether in Latin. Politian, as he grew older, disdained this abortive production of his youthful muse, and relied for his character with posterity on his Latin poems and his elaborate commentaries upon the ancient classics. Petrarch looked for immortality to his "Africa," as did Boccaccio to his learned Latin disquisition upon ancient mythology.* Could they now, after the lapse of more than four centuries, revisit the world, how would they be astonished, perhaps mortified, the former to find that he was remembered only as the sonneteer, and the latter as the novelist? The Latin prose of Politian may be consulted by an antiquary; his Latin poetry must be admired by scholars of taste; but his few Italian verses constitute the basis of his high reputation at this day with the great body of his countrymen. He wrote several lyrical pieces and a short pastoral drama (*Orfeo*), the first of a species which afterward grew into such repute under the hands of Tasso and Guarini.

* "*De Genealogia Deorum.*"—The Latin writings of Boccaccio and Petrarch may be considered the foundation of their fame with their contemporaries. The coronation of the latter in the Roman capitol was a homage paid rather to his achievements in an ancient tongue than to any in his own. He does not even notice his Italian lyrics in his "*Letters to Posterity.*"

All of these bear the same print of his genius. One cannot but regret that so rare a mind should, in conformity with the perverse taste of his age, have abandoned the freshness of a living tongue for the ungrateful culture of a dead one. His "Stanze," the mere prologue of an epic, still survive amid the complete and elaborate productions of succeeding poets; they may be compared to the graceful portico of some unfinished temple, which time and taste have respected, and which remains as in the days of its architect, a beautiful ruin.

Luigi Pulci, the other eminent poet whom we mentioned as a frequent guest at the table of Lorenzo de' Medici, was of a noble family, and the youngest of three brothers, all of them even more distinguished by their accomplishments than by birth. There seems to be nothing worthy of particular record in his private history. He is said to have possessed a frank and merry disposition, and, to judge from his great poem, as well as from some lighter pieces of burlesque satire, which he bandied with one of his friends, whom he was in the habit of meeting at the house of Lorenzo, he was not particularly fastidious in his humor. His *Morgante Maggiore* is reported to have been written at the request of Lorenzo's mother, and recited at his table. It is a genuine epic of chivalry, containing twenty-eight cantos, founded on the traditionary defeat, the "dolorosa rotta" of Charlemagne and his peers in the Valley of Roncesvalles. It adheres much more closely than any of the other Italian romances to the lying chronicle of Turpin.

It may appear singular that the intention of the author should not become apparent in the course of eight-and-twenty cantos; but it is a fact, that scholars both at home and abroad have long disputed whether the poem is serious or satirical. Crescimbeni styles the author "modesto e moderato," while Tiraboschi expressly charges him with the deliberate design of ridiculing Scripture, and Voltaire, in his preface, cites the *Morgante* as an apology for his profligate "Pucelle." It cannot

be denied that the story abounds in such ridiculous eccentricities as give it the air of a parody upon the marvels of romance. The hero, Morgante, is a converted infidel, "*un gigante smisurato*," whose formidable weapon is a bell-clapper, and who, after running through some twenty cantos of gigantic valor and mountebank extravagance, is brought to an untimely end by a wound in the heel, not from a Trojan arrow, but from the bite of a crab! We doubt, however, whether Pulci intended his satirical shafts for the Christian faith. Liberal allowance is to be conceded for the fashion of his age. Nothing is more frequent in the productions of that period than such irreverent freedoms with the most sacred topics as would be quite shocking in ours. Such freedoms, however, cannot reasonably be imputed to profanity, or even levity, since numerous instances of them occur in works of professed moral tendency, as in the mysteries and moralities, for example, those solemn deformities of the ancient French and English drama. The chronicle of Turpin, the basis of Pulci's epic, which, though a fraud, was a pious one, invented by some priest to celebrate the triumphs of the Christian arms, is tainted with the same indecent familiarities.*

Tempora mutantur. In a scandalous pasquinade published by Lord Byron in the first number of his *Liberal*, there is a verse describing St. Peter officiating as the doorkeeper of heaven. Pulci has a similar one in the Morgante (canto xxvi., st. 91), which, no doubt, furnished the hint to his lordship, who has often improved

* This spurious document of the twelfth century contains, in a copy which we have now before us, less than sixty pages. It has neither the truth of history nor the beauty of fiction. It abounds in commonplace prodigies, and sets forth Charlemagne's wars and his defeat in the valley of Roncesvalles, an event which probably never happened. Insignificant as it is in every other respect, however, it is the seed from which has sprung up those romantic fictions which adorned the rude age of the Normans, and which flourished in such wide luxuriance under Italian culture.

upon the Italian poets. Both authors describe St. Peter's dress and vocation with the most whimsical minuteness. In the Italian, the passage, introduced into the midst of a solemn, elaborate description, has all the appearance of being told in very good faith. No one will venture to put so charitable a construction upon his lordship's motives.

Whatever may have been the intention of Pulci in the preceding portion of the work, its concluding cantos are animated by the genuine spirit of Christian heroism. The rear of Charlemagne's army is drawn into an ambuscade by the treachery of his confidant, Ganelon. Roncesvalles, a valley in the heart of the Pyrenees, is the theater of action, and Orlando, with the flower of French chivalry, perishes there, overpowered by the Saracens. The battle is told in a sublime epic tone worthy of the occasion. The cantos xxvi., xxvii., containing it, are filled with a continued strain of high religious enthusiasm, with the varying, animating bustle of a mortal conflict, with the most solemn and natural sentiment suggested by the horror of the situation. Orlando's character rises into that of the divine warrior. His speech at the opening of the action, his lament over his unfortunate army, his melancholy reflections on the battle-field the night after the engagement, are conceived with such sublimity and pathos as attest both the poetical talent of Pulci and the grandeur and capacity of his subject. Yet the Morgante, the great part of which is so ludicrous, is the only eminent Italian epic which has seriously described the celebrated rout at Roncesvalles.

Pulci's poem is not much read by the Italians. Its style, in general, is too unpolished for the fastidious delicacy of a modern ear, but as it abounds in the old fashioned proverbialisms (*riboboli*) of Florence, it is greatly prized by the Tuscan purists. These familiar sayings, the elegant slang of the Florentine mob, have a value among the Italian scholars, at least among a large faction

of them, much like that of old coins with a virtuoso: the more rare and rusty, the better. They give a high relish to many of their ancient writers, who, without other merit than their antiquity, are cited as authorities in their vocabulary.* These *riboboli* are to be met with most abundantly in their old *novelle*, those, especially, which are made up of familiar dialogue between the lower classes of citizens. Boccaccio has very many such; Sacchetti has more than all his prolific tribe, and it is impossible for a foreigner to discern or to appreciate the merits of such a writer. The lower classes in Florence retain to this day much of their antique picturesque phraseology,† and Alfieri tells us that "it was his great delight to stand in some unnoticed corner, and listen to the conversation of the mob in the market-place."

With the exception of Orlando, Pulci has shown no great skill in delineation of character. Charlemagne and Ganelon are the prominent personages. The latter is a parody on traitors; he is a traitor to common sense. Charlemagne is a superannuated dupe, with just credulity sufficient to dovetail into all the cunning contrivances of Gan. The women have neither refinement nor virtue. The knights have none of the softer graces of chivalry; they bully and swagger like the rude heroes of Homer, and are exclusively occupied with the merciless extermination of infidels. We meet with none of the imagery, the rich sylvan scenery so lavishly diffused through the epics of Ariosto and Boiardo. The *machinery* bears none of the airy touches of an Arabian pencil, but is

* This has been loudly censured by many of their scholars opposed to the literary supremacy of the Della-Cruscan Academy. See, in particular, the acute treatise of Cesa-rotti, "*Saggio sulla Filosofia delle Lingue*," Parte IV.

† "The pure language of Boccaccio, and of other ancient writers, is preserved at this day much more among the lower classes of Florentine mechanics and of the neighboring peasants than among the more polished Tuscan society, whose original dialect has suffered great mutations in their intercourse with foreigners."—*Pignotti*, "*Storia della Toscana*," tom. ii., p. 167.

made out of the cold excrescences of Northern superstition, dwarfs, giants, and necromancers. Before quitting Pulci, we must point out a passage (canto xxv., st. 229, 230), in which a devil announces to Rinaldo the existence of another continent beyond the ocean, inhabited by mortals like himself. The theory of gravitation is also plainly intimated. As the poem was written before the voyages of Columbus, and before the physical discoveries of Galileo and Copernicus, the predictions are extremely curious.* The fiend, alluding to the vulgar superstitions entertained of the Pillars of Hercules, thus addresses his companion:

“Know that this theory is false, his bark
 The daring mariner shall urge far o’er
 The Western wave, a smooth and level plain,
 Albeit the earth is fashion’d like a wheel.
 Man was in ancient days of grosser mould,
 And Hercules might blush to learn how far
 Beyond the limits he had vainly set,
 The dullest seaboat soon shall wing her way.
 Men shall descry another hemisphere,
 Since to one common centre all things tend;
 So earth, by curious mystery divine
 Well balanced, hangs amid the starry spheres.
 At our antipodes are cities, states,
 And thronged empires, ne’er divined of yore.
 But see, the sun speeds on his western path
 To glad the nations with expected light.”

The dialogues of Pulci’s devils respecting free-will and necessity, their former glorious, and their present fallen condition, have suggested many hints for our greater Milton to improve upon. The juggling frolics of these fiends at the royal banquet in Saragossa may have been the original of the comical marvels played off through the intervention of similar agents by Dr. Faust.

Notwithstanding the good faith and poetical

* Dante, two centuries before, had also expressed the same belief in an undiscovered quarter of the globe:

“De’ vostri sensi, ch’è del rimanente,
 Non vogliate negar l’esperienza,
Diretro al sol, del mondo senza gente.”

Inferno, can. xxvi., v. 115.

elevation of its concluding cantos, the *Morgante*, according to our apprehension, is anything but a serious romance. Not that it shows a disposition to satire, above all, to the religious satire often imputed to it; but there is a light banter, a vein of fun running through the greater portion of it, which is quite the opposite of the lofty spirit of chivalry. Romantic fiction, among our Norman ancestors, grew so directly out of the feudal relations and adventurous spirit of the age, that it was treated with all the gravity of historical record. When reproduced in the polite and artificial societies of Italy, the same fictions wore an air of ludicrous extravagance which would no longer admit of their being repeated seriously. Recommended, however, by a proper seasoning of irony, they might still amuse as ingenious tales of wonder. This may be kept in view in following out the ramifications of Italian narrative poetry; for they will all be found, in a greater or less degree, tinctured with the same spirit of ridicule.* The circle for whom Pulci composed his epic was peculiarly distinguished by that fondness for good-humored raillery, which may be considered

* A distinction may be pointed out between the Norman and the Italian epics of chivalry. The former, composed in the rude ages of feudal heroism, are entitled to much credit as pictures of the manners of that period; while the latter, written in an age of refinement, have been carried by their poets into such beautiful extravagances of fiction as are perfectly incompatible with a state of society at any period. Let any one compare the feats of romantic valor recorded by Froissart, the turbulent, predatory habits of the barons and *ecclesiastics* under the early Norman dynasty, as reported by Turner in his late "*History of England*," with these old romances, and he will find enough to justify our remark. St. Pelaye, after a diligent study of the ancient epics, speaks of them as exhibiting a picture of society closely resembling that set forth in the chronicles of the period. Turner, after as diligent an examination of early historical documents, pronounces that the facts contained in them perfectly accord with the general portraiture of manners depicted in the romances.—*Mem. de l'Acad. des Inscriptions*, tom. xx., *Art. sur l'Ancient Chevalerie*. Turner's "*History of England from the Norman Conquest*," etc., vol. i., ch. vi.,

a national trait with his countrymen. It seems to have been the delight of Lorenzo de' Medici, as it was afterward, in a more remarkable degree, of his son Leo Tenth, to abandon himself to the most unreserved social freedoms with the friends whom he collected around his table. The satirical epigrams which passed there in perfect good humor between his guests, show, at least, full as much merriment as manners. Machiavelli concludes his history of Florence with an elaborate portrait of Lorenzo, in which he says that "he took greater delight in frivolous pleasures, and in the society of jesters and satirists, than became so great a man." The historian might have been less austere in his commentary upon Lorenzo's taste, since he was not particularly fastidious in the selection of his own amusements.*

At the close of the fifteenth century Italy was divided into a number of small but independent states, whose petty sovereigns vied with each other, not merely in the poor parade of royal pageantry, but in the liberal endowment of scientific institutions, and the patronage of learned men. Almost every Italian scholar was attached to some one or other of these courtly circles, and a generous, enlightened emulation sprung up

* A letter written by Machiavelli, long unknown, and printed for the first time at Milan, 1810, gives a curious picture of his daily occupations when living in retirement, on his little patrimony, at a distance from Florence. Among other particulars, he mentions that it was his custom after dinner to repair to the tavern, where he passed his afternoon at cards with the company whom he ordinarily found there, consisting of the host, a miller, a butcher, and a lime-maker. Another part of the epistle exhibits a more pleasing view of the pursuits of the ex-secretary. "In the evening I return to my house and retire to my study. I then take off the rustic garments which I had worn during the day, and having dressed myself in the apparel which I used to wear at court and in town, I mingle in the society of the great men of antiquity. I draw from them the nourishment which alone is suited to me, and during the four hours passed in this intercourse I forget all my misfortunes, and fear neither poverty nor death. In this manner I have composed a little work upon government." This little work was *The Prince*.

among the states of Italy, such as had never before existed in any other age or country. Among the republics of ancient Greece the rivalry was *political*. Their *literature*, from the time of Solon, was almost exclusively Athenian. An interesting picture of the cultivated manners and intellectual pleasures of these little courts may be gathered from the *Cortigiano* of Castiglione, which contains in the introduction a particular account of the pursuits and pastimes at the court of his sovereign, the Duke of Urbino.

None of these Italian states make so shining a figure in literary history as the insignificant duchy of Ferrara. The foul crimes which defile the domestic annals of the family of Este have been forgotten in the munificent patronage extended by them to letters. The librarians of the Biblioteca Estense, Muratori and Tiraboschi, have celebrated the virtues of their native princes with the encomiastic pen of loyalty; while Ariosto and Tasso, whose misfortunes furnish but an indifferent commentary upon these eulogiums, offering to them the grateful incense of poetic adulation, have extended their names still wider by inscribing them upon their immortal epics. Their patronage had the good fortune, not always attending patronage, of developing genius. Those models of the pastoral drama, the *Aminta* of Tasso, and the *Pastor Fido* of Guarini, whose luxury of expression, notwithstanding the *dictum* of Dr. Johnson,* it has been found as difficult to imitate in their own tongue as it is impossible to translate into any other; the comedies and Horatian satires of Ariosto; the *Secchia Rapita* of Tassoni, the acknowledged model of the mock-heroic poems of Pope and Boileau; and, finally, the three great epics of Italy, the *Orlando Innamorato*, the *Furioso*, and the *Gerusalemme Liberata*, were all produced in the brief compass of a century, within the limited dominions of the house

* "Dione is a counterpart to *Aminta* and *Pastor Fido*, and other trifles of the same kind, easily imitated and unworthy of imitation."—*Life of Gay*.

of Este. Dante had reproached Ferrara, in the thirteenth century, with never having been illustrated by the name of a poet.

Boiardo, Count of Scandiano, the author of the *Orlando Innamorato*, the first-born of these epics, was a subject of Hercules First, Duke of Ferrara, and by him appointed governor of Reggio. His military conduct in that office, and his learned translations from the ancient classics, show him to have been equally accomplished as a soldier and as a scholar. In the intervals of war, to which his active life was devoted, he amused himself with the composition of his long poem. He had spun this out into the sixty-seventh canto without showing any disposition to bring it to a conclusion, when his literary labors were suddenly interrupted, as he informs us in his parting stanza, by the invasion of the French into Italy in 1794, and in the same year the author died. The *Orlando Innamorato*, as it advanced, had been read by its author to his friends; but no portion of it was printed till after his death, and its extraordinary merits were not then widely estimated, in consequence of its antiquated phraseology and Lombard provincialisms. A *Rifacimento* some time after appeared, by one Domenichi, who spoiled many of the beauties, without improving the style of his original. Finally, Berni, in little more than thirty years after the death of Boiardo, new-moulded the whole poem,* with so much dexterity as to retain the substance of every verse in the original, and yet to clothe them in the seductive graces of his own classical idiom. Berni's version is the only one now read in Italy, and the original poem of Boiardo is so rare in that country, that

*Sismondi is mistaken in saying that Berni remodelled the *Innamorato* sixty years after the original. He survived Boiardo only forty-two years, and he had half completed his *Rifacimento* at least ten years before his own death, as is evident from his beautiful invocation to Verona and the Po (canto xxx.) on whose banks he was then writing it, and where he was living, 1526, in the capacity of secretary to the Bishop of Verona.

it was found impossible to procure, for the library of Harvard University, any copy of the *Innamorato* more ancient than the reformed one by Domenichi.

The history of letters affords no stronger example of the power of *style* than the different fate of these two productions of Berni and Boiardo. We doubt whether the experiment would have been attended with the same result among a people by whom the nicer beauties of expression are less cultivated, as with the English, for example. If we may judge from the few specimens which we have seen extracted from the Italian original, Chaucer exhibits a more obsolete and exotic phraseology than Boiardo. Yet the partial attempt of Dryden to invest the father of English poetry with a modernized costume has had little success, and the little epic of *Palamon and Arcite* (*The Knight's Tale*) is much more highly relished in the rude but muscular diction of Chaucer than in the polished version of his imitator.

Whatever may be the estimation of the style, the glory of the original delineation of character and incident is to be given exclusively to Boiardo. He was the first of the epic poets who founded a romance upon the love of Orlando; and a large portion of the poem is taken up with the adventures of this hero and his doughty Paladius, assembled in a remote province of China for the defence of his mistress, the beautiful Angelica:

“When Agrican, with all his northern powers,
Beseiged Albracca, as romances tell,
The city of Gallaphrone, from thence to win
The fairest of her sex, Angelica
His daughter, sought by many prowess knights
Both Paynim, and the peers of Charlemagne.”
Paradise Regained.

With the exception of the midnight combat between Agrican and Orlando, in which the conversion of the dying Tartar reminds one of the similar, but more affecting death of Clorinda, in the *Jerusalem Delivered*, there is very little moral interest attached to these combats of Boiardo,

which are mere gladiatorial exhibitions of hard fighting, and sharp, jealous wrangling. The fairy gardens of Falerina and Morgana, upon which the poet enters in the second book, are much better adapted to the display of his wild and exuberant imagination. No Italian writer, not even Ariosto, is comparable to Boiardo for exhibitions of fancy. Enchantment follows enchantment, and the reader, bewildered with the number and rapidity of the transitions, looks in vain for some clew, even the slender thread of allegory which is held out by the poet, to guide him through the unmeaning marvellous of Arabian fiction. Ariosto has tempered his imagination with more discretion. Both of these great romantic poets have wrought upon the same characters, and afford, in this respect, a means of accurate comparison. Without going into details, we may observe, in general, that Boiardo has more strength than grace; Ariosto, the reverse. Boiardo's portraits are painted, or may be rather said to be sculptured, with a clear, coarse hand, out of some rude material. Ariosto's are sketched with the volatile graces, nice shades, and variable drapery of the most delicate Italian pencil. In female portraiture, of course, Ariosto is far superior to his predecessor. The glaring coquetry of Boiardo's Angelica is refined by the hand of his rival into something like the coquetry of high life, and the ferocious tigress beauties of the original Marfisa are softened into those of a more polished and courtly amazon. The *Innamorato* contains no examples of the pure, deep feeling, which gives a soul to the females of the *Furioso*, and we look in vain for the frolic and airy scenes which enchant us so frequently in the latter poem*. We may remark in conclusion, that the rapid and unintermitting succession of incidents in the *Innamorato* prevents the poet from indulging

* The chase of the Fairy Morgana, and the malicious dance of the Loves round Rinaldo (l. ii., c. viii., xv.), may, however, be considered good exceptions to this remark.

in those collateral beauties of sentiment and imagery which are prodigally diffused over the romance of Ariosto, and which give to it an exquisite finish.

Berni's *Rifacimento* of the Orlando Innamorato, as we have already observed, first made it popular with the Italians, by a magical varnish of versification, which gave greater luster to the beauties of his original, and glossed over its defects. It has, however, the higher merit of exhibiting a great variety of *original* reflections, sometimes in the form of digressions, but more frequently as introductions to the cantos. These are enlivened by the shrewd wit and *elaborate artlessness* of expression, that form the peculiar attraction of Berni's poetry. In one of the prefatory stanzas to the fifty-first canto, the reader may recognize a curious coincidence with a well-known passage in Shakspeare; the more so, as Berni, we believe, was never turned into English before the present partial attempt of Mr. Rose:

"Who steals a bugle-horn, a ring, a steed,
Or such like worthless thing, has some discretion;
'Tis petty larceny: not such his deed
Who robs us of our fame, our best possession.
And he who takes our labor's worthiest meed
May well be deem'd a felon by profession;
Who so much more our hate and scourge deserves,
As from the rule of right he wider swerves."

In another of these episodes the poet has introduced a portrait of himself. The whole passage is too long for insertion here; but, as Mr. Rose has also translated it, we will borrow a few stanzas from his skillful version:

"His mood was choleric, and his tongue was vicious,
But he was praised for singleness of heart;
Not taxed as avaricious or ambitious,
Affectionate and frank, and void of art;
A lover of his friends, and unsuspecting;
But where he hated knew no middle part;
And men his malice by his love might rate:
But then he was more prone to love than hate.

"To paint his person, this was thin and dry:
Well sorting it, his legs were spare and lean;

Broad was his visage, and his nose was high,
 While narrow was the space that was between
 His eyebrows sharp; and blue his hollow eye,
 Which for his bushy beard had not been seen
 But that the master kept this thicket clear'd,
 At mortal war with mustache and with beard.

"No one did ever servitude detest
 Like him, though servitude was still his dole;
 Since fortune or the devil did their best
 To keep him evermore beneath control.
 While, whatsoever was his patron's hest
 To execute it went against his soul;
 His service would he freely yield, unask'd,
 But lost all heart and hope if he were task'd.

"Nor music, hunting match, nor mirthful measure,
 Nor play, nor other pastime, moved him aught;
 And if 'twas true that horses gave him pleasure,
 The simple sight of them was all he sought,
 Too poor to purchase; and his only treasure
 His naked bed; his pastime to do naught
 But tumble there, and stretch his weary length,
 And so recruit his spirits and his strength."

Rose's Innamorato, p. 48.

The passage goes on to represent the dreamy and luxurious pleasures of this indolent pastime, with such an epicurean minuteness of detail as puts the sincerity of the poet beyond a doubt. His smaller pieces, *Capitoli*, as they are termed, contain many incidental allusions which betray the same lazy propensity.

The early part of Berni's life was passed in Rome, where he obtained a situation under the ecclesiastical government. He was afterward established in a canonry at Florence, where he led an easy, effeminate life, much caressed for his social talents by the Duke Alessandro de' edici. His end was more tragical than was to have been anticipated from so quiet and unambitious a temper. He is said to have been secretly assassinated, 1536, by the order of Alexander, for refusing to administer poison to the duke's enemy, the Cardinal Hyppolito de' Medici. The story is told in many contradictory ways by different Italian writers, some of whom disbelieve it altogether. The imputation, however, is an evidence of the

profligate character of that court, and, if true, is only one out of many examples of perfidious assassination, which, in that age, dishonored some of the most polished societies in Italy.

Berni has had the distinction of conferring his name on a peculiar species of Italian composition.* The epithet "*Bernesco*" is not derived, however, as has been incorrectly stated by some foreign scholars,† from his reformed version of the "*Orlando*," but from his smaller pieces, his *Capitoli* more especially. It is difficult to convey a correct and adequate notion of this kind of satirical trifling, since its chief excellence results from idiomatic felicities of expression that refuse to be transplanted into a foreign tongue, and there is no imitation of it, that we recollect, in our own language. It is a misapplication of the term *Bernesque* to apply it, as has been sometimes done, to the ironical style supposed to have been introduced by Lord Byron in his *Beppo* and *Don Juan*. The clear, unequivocal vein of irony which plays through the sportive sallies of the Italian has no resemblance to the subdued but caustic sneer of the Englishman; nor does it, in our opinion, resemble in the least Peter Pindar's burlesque satire, to which an excellent critic in Italian poetry has compared it.‡ Pindar is much too unrefined in versification and in diction to justify the parallel. Italian poetry always preserves the purity of its expression, however coarse or indecent may be the topic on which it is employed. The subjects of many of these poems are of the most whimsical and trivial nature. We find some in *Lode della peste, del Debito*, etc. Several in commendation of the delicacies of the table, of "*jellies*," "*cois*," or any other dainty

* He cannot be properly considered its *inventor*, however. He lived in time to give the last polish to a species of familiar poetry, which had been long undergoing the process of refinement from the hands of his countrymen.

† Vide *Annotazioni alla Vita di Berni*, dal conte Mazzuchelli. Clas. Ital., p. xxxiv.

‡ Roscoe's "*Life of Loren. de' Medici*," vol. i., p. 392, *Note*.

which pleased his epicurean palate. These *Capitoli*, like most of the compositions of this polished versifier, furnish a perfect example of the triumph of style. The sentiments, sometimes indelicate, and often puerile, may be considered, like the worthless insects occasionally found in amber, indebted for their preservation to the beautiful substance in which they are embedded.

It is a curious fact, that, notwithstanding the apparent facility and fluent graces of Berni's style, it was wrought with infinite care. Some of his verses have been corrected twenty and thirty times. Many of his countrymen have imitated it, mistaking its familiarity of manner for facility of execution.

This fastidious revision has been common with the most eminent Italian poets. Petrarch devoted months to the perfecting of one of his exquisite sonnets.* Ariosto, as his son Virginus records of him, "was never satisfied with his verses, but was continually correcting and recorrecting them;" almost every stanza in the last edition of his poem published in his lifetime is altered from the original, and one verse is pointed out (canto XVIII., st. 142) whose variations filled many pages. Tasso's manuscripts, preserved in the library at Modena, have been so often retouched by him that they are hardly intelligible; and Alfieri was

* The following is a literal translation of a succession of memorandums in Latin at the head of one of his sonnets: "I began this by the impulse of the Lord (*Dominio jubente*,) tenth September, at the dawn of day, after my morning prayers."

"I must make these two verses over again, singling them, and I must transpose them. Three o'clock A. M., 19th October."

"I like this. (*Hoc placet*) 30th October."

"No, this does not please me. 20th December, in the evening."

"February 18th, towards noon. This is now well; however, look at it again."

It was generally on Friday that he occupied himself with the painful labor of correction, and this was also set apart by him as a day of fast and penitence.—"*Ikshaya*," *cit. sup.*

in the habit, not only of correcting verses, but of remoulding whole tragedies, several of which, he tells us in his *Memoirs*, were thus transcribed by him no less than three times. It is remarkable, that in a country where the imagination has been most active, the labor of the file should have been most diligently exerted on poetical compositions. Such examples of the pains taken by men of real genius might furnish a wholesome hint to some of the rapid, dashing writers of our own day. "Avec quelque talent qu'on puisse être né," says Rousseau, in his *Confessions*, "L'art d'écrire ne se prend pas tout d'un coup."

We have violated the chronological series of the Italian epopee, in our notice of Berni, in order to connect his poem with the model on which it was cast. We will quit him with the remark, that for his fame he seems to have been as much indebted to good fortune as to desert. His countrymen have affixed his name to an illustrious poem of which he was not the author, and to a popular species of composition of which he was not the inventor.

In little more than twenty years after the death of Boiardo, Ariosto gave to the world his first edition of the *Orlando Furioso*. The celebrity of the *Innamorato* made Ariosto prefer building upon this sure foundation to casting a new one of his own, and as his predecessor had fortunately left all the dramatis personæ of his unfinished epic alive upon the stage, he had only to continue their histories to the end of the drama. "As the former of these two poems has no termination, and the latter no regular beginning, they may both be considered as forming one complete epic.* The latter half was, however, destined not only to supply the deficiencies, but to eclipse the glories of the former.

Louis Ariosto was born of a respectable family at Reggio, 1474. After serving a reluctant apprenticeship of five years in the profession of the

*Tasso, *Discorsi Poetici*, p. 29

law, his father allowed him to pursue other studies better adapted to his taste and poetical genius. The elegance of his lyrical compositions in Latin and Italian recommended him to the patronage of the Cardinal Hyppolito d'Este, and of his brother Alphonso, who in 1505 succeeded to the ducal throne of Ferrara. Ariosto's abilities were found, however, not to be confined to poetry, and, among other offices of trust, he was employed by the duke in two important diplomatic negotiations with the court of Rome. But the Muses still obtained his principal homage, and all his secret leisure was applied to the perfecting of the great poem, which was to commemorate at once his own gratitude and the glories of the house of Este. After fourteen years assiduous labor, he presented to the Cardinal Hyppolito the first copy of his *Orlando Furioso*. The well-known reply of the prelate, "*Messer Lodovico, dove mai avete trovate tante fanfaluche?*" "Master Louis, where have you picked up so many trifles?" will be remembered in Italy as long as the poem itself.*

Ariosto, speaking of his early study of jurisprudence in one of his Satires,† says that he passed five years *in quelle ciancie*; a word which signifies much the same with the epithet *fanfaluche* or *coglionerie*, whichever it might have been, imputed to the cardinal. Ariosto was a poet; the cardinal was a mathematician; and each had the very common failing of undervaluing a profession different from his own. The courtly librarian of the *Biblioteca Estense*, endeavors to explain away this and the subsequent conduct of Ariosto's patron;‡ but the poet's Satires, in which he alludes to the behavior of the cardinal with the fine railery, and to his own situation with the philosophic independence of Horace, furnish abundant evi-

* An interrogation, which might remind an Englishman of that put by the great Duke of Cumberland to Gibbon: "What, Mr. Gibbon, scribble, scribble, scribble still?"

† A. M. Pietro Bembo Cardinale.

‡ *Storia della Lett. Ital.*, tom. vii., P. i., p. 42, 43.

dence of the cold, ungenerous deportment of Hypopolito.*

Notwithstanding the alienation of the cardinal the poet still continued in favor with Alphonso. The patronage bestowed upon him, however, seems to have been of a very selfish and sordid complexion. He was employed by the duke in offices most vexatious to one of his studious disposition, and he passed three years in reducing to tranquility a barbarous, rebellious province of the duchy. His adventure there with a troop of banditti, who abandoned a meditated attack upon him when they learned that he was the author of the *Orlando Furioso*, is a curious instance of homage to literary talent, which may serve as a *pendant* to the similar anecdote recorded of Tasso.†

* In a satire addressed to Alessandro Ariosto, he speaks openly of the unprofitableness of his poetic labors:

"Thanks to the Muses who reward
So well the service of their bard,
He almost may be said to lack
A decent coat to clothe his back."

And soon after, in the same epistle, he adverts with undisguised indignation to the oppressive patronage of Hypopolito:

"If the poor stipend I receive
Has led his highness to believe
He has a right to task my toil
Like any serf's upon his soil,
T' enthrall me with a servile chain
That grinds my soul, his hopes are vain.
Sooner than be such household slave,
The sternest poverty I'll brave,
And from his pride and presents free,
Resume my long-lost liberty."

† Ginguenè, whose facts are never to be suspected, whatever credit may be attached to his opinions, has related both these adventures without any qualification (*Histoire Littéraire d'Italie*, tom. iv., p. 359, et V. 291). This learned Frenchman professes to have compiled his history under the desire of vindicating Italian literature from the disparaging opinions entertained of it among his countrymen. This has led him to swell the trumpet of panegyric somewhat too stoutly—indeed, much above the modest tone of the Italian *savant*, who, upon his premature death, was appointed to continue the work. Ginguenè died before he had completed the materials for his ninth volume, and

The latter portion of his life was passed on his own estate in comparative retirement. He refused all public employment, and, with the exception of his satires, and a few comedies which he prepared for the theater committed to his superintendence by Alphonso, he produced no new work. His hours were diligently occupied with the emendation and extension of his great poem; and in 1532, soon after the republication of it in forty-six cantos, as it now stands, he died of a disease induced by severe and sedentary application.

Ariosto is represented to have possessed a cheerful disposition, temperate habits, and their usual concomitant, a good constitution. Barotti has quoted, in his memoirs of the poet, some particulars respecting him, found among the papers of Virginus, his natural son. He is there said not to have been a great reader; Horace and Catullus were the authors in whom he took most delight. His intense meditation upon the subject of his compositions frequently betrayed him into fits of abstraction, one of which is recorded. Intending, on a fine morning, to take his usual walk, he set out from Carpi, where he resided, and reached Ferrara late in the afternoon, in his slippers and robe de chambre, uninterrupted by any one. His patrimony, though small, was equal to his necessities. An inscription which he placed over his door is indicative of that moderation and love of independence which distinguished his character:

“Parva, sed apta mihi, sed nulli obnoxia, sed non
Sordida, parva meo sed tamen ære domus.”

It does not appear probable that he was ever married. He frequently alludes in his poems to some object of his affections, but without naming her. His bronze inkstand, still preserved in the library at Ferrara, is surmounted by a *relievo* of a Cupid with his finger upon his lip, emblematic of a dis-

the hiatus supplied by Professor Salfi carries down the literary narrative only to the conclusion of the sixteenth century.

creet silence not very common in these matters with his countrymen. He is said to have intended his mistress by the beautiful protrait of Ginevra (c. IV., v.), as Tasso afterward shadowed out Leonora in the affecting episode of Sophronia. This was giving them, according to Ariosto's own allusion, a glorious niche in the temple of immortality.*

There still existed a general affectation among the Italian scholars of writing in the Latin language when Ariosto determined to compose an epic poem. The most accomplished proficient in that ancient tongue flourished about this period, and Politian, Pontano, Vida, Sannazarius, Sadolet, Bembo, had revived, both in prose and poetry, the purity, precision, and classic elegance of the Augustan age. Politian and Lorenzo de Medici were the only writers of the preceding century who had displayed the fecundity and poetical graces of their vernacular tongue, and their productions had been too few and of too trifling a nature to establish a permanent precedent. Bembo, who wrote his elaborate history first in Latin, and who carried the complicated inversions, in fact, the idiom of that language, into his Italian compositions, would have persuaded Ariosto to write his poem in the same tongue; but he wisely replied that "he would rather be first among Tuscan writers than second among the Latin," and, following the impulse of his own more discriminating taste, he gave, in the *Orlando Furioso*, such an exhibition of the fine tones and flexible movements of his native language as settled the question of its precedence forever with his countrymen.

Ariosto at first intended to adopt the *terza rima* of Dante; indeed, the introductory verses of his poem in this measure are still preserved. He soon abandoned it, however, for the *ottava rima*, which is much better adapted to the light, rambling, picturesque narrative of the romantic epic.† Every

* O. F., can. xxxv., st. 15, 16.

† The Italians, since the failure of Trissino, have very generally adopted this measure for their epic poetry, while

stanza furnishes a little picture in itself, and the perpetual recurrence of the same rhyme produces not only a most agreeable melody to the ear, but is very favorable to a full and more powerful development of the poet's sentiments. Instances of the truth of this remark must be familiar to every reader of Ariosto. It has been applied by Warton, with equal justice, to Spenser, whom the similar repetition of identical cadences often leads to a copious and beautiful expansion of imagery.* Spenser's stanza differs materially from the Italian *ottava rima*, in having one more rhyme, and in the elongated Alexandrine with which it is concluded. This gave to his verses "the long, majestic march," well suited to the sober sublimity of his genius; but the additional rhyme much increased its metrical difficulties, already, from the comparative infrequency of assonance in our language, far superior to those of the Italian. This has few compound sounds, but, rolling wholly upon the five open vowels, *a, e, i, o, u*, affords a prodigious number of corresponding terminations. Hence their facility of *improvisation*. Voltaire observes that, in the Jerusalem Delivered, not more than seven words terminate in *u*, and expresses his astonish-

the *terza rima* is used for didactic and satirical composition. The graver subjects which have engaged the attention of some of their poets during the last century have made blank verse (*verso sciolto*) more fashionable among them. Cesarotti's Ossian, one of the earliest, may be cited as one of the most successful examples of it. No nation is so skillful in a nice adaptation of style to the subject, and *imitative harmony* has been carried by them to a perfection which it can never hope to attain in any other living language; for what other language is made so directly out of the elements of music?

* The following stanza from the "Faërie Queene," describing the habitation of Morpheus "drowned deep in drowsie fit," may serve as an exemplification of our meaning:

"And more to lull him in his slumber soft,
A trickling streame from high rock tumbling downe,
And ever drizzling raine upon the loft,
Mixt with a murmuring winde much like the sowne

ment that we do not find a greater monotony in the constant recurrence of only four rhymes.* The reason may be, that, in Italian poetry, the rhyme falls both upon the penultima and the final syllable of each verse; and as these two syllables in the same word turn upon different vowels, a greater variety is given to the melody. This double rhyming termination, moreover, gives an inexpressible lightness and delicacy to Italian poetry, very different from the broad comic which similar compound rhymes, no doubt from the infrequency of their application to serious subjects, communicate to the English.

Ariosto is commonly most admired for the inexhaustible fertility of his fancy; yet a large proportion of his fictions are borrowed, copied, or continued from those of preceding poets. The elegant allegories of ancient superstition, as they were collected or invented by Homer and Ovid, the wild adventures of the Norman romances, the licentious merriment of the gossiping fabliaux, and the enchantments of Eastern fable, have all been employed in the fabric of Ariosto's epic. But, although this diminishes his claims to an inventive fancy, yet, on the whole, it exalts his character as a poet; for these same fictions under the hands of preceding romancers, even of Boiardo, were cold and uninteresting, or, at best, raised in the mind of the reader only a stupid admiration, like that occasioned by the grotesque and unmeaning wonders of a fairy tale. But Ariosto inspired them with a deep and living interest; he adorned them with the graces of sentiment and poetic imagery, and enlivened them by a vein of wit and shrewd reflection.

Ariosto's style is most highly esteemed by his countrymen. The clearness with which it express-

Of swarming bees, did cast him in a swowne;
 No other noyes nor people's troublous cries
 As still are wont to annoy the walled towne
 Might there be heard; but careless quiet lyes,
 Wrapt in eternall silence farre from enemies."

* *Lettere à Deodati di Torazzi.*

es the most subtle and delicate beauties of sentiment may be compared to Alcina's.

"Vel sottile e rado,
Che non copria dinanzi nè di dietro,
Piu che le rose o i gigli un chiaro vetro."

—C. vii., s. 28.*

We recollect no English poet whose manner in any degree resembles him. La Fontaine, the most exquisite versifier of his nation, when in his least familiar mood, comes the nearest to him among the French. Spence remarks, that Spenser must have imagined Ariosto intended to write a serious romantic poem. The same opinion has been maintained by some of the Italian critics. Such, however, is not the impression we receive from it. Not to mention the broad farce with which the narrative is occasionally checkered, as the adventures of Giocondo, the Enchanted Cup, etc., a sly, suppressed smile seems to lurk at the bottom even of his most serious reflections; sometimes, indeed, it plays openly upon the surface of his narrative, but more frequently, after a beautiful and sober description, it breaks out, as it were, from behind a cloud, and lights up the whole with a gay and comic coloring. It would seem as if the natural acuteness of his poetic taste led him to discern in the *magnanime mensoigne* of romantic fable abundant sources of the grand and beautiful, while the anti-chivalric character of his age, and, still more, the lively humor of his nation, led him to laugh at its extravagances. Hence the delicate intermixture of serious and comic, which gives a most agreeable variety, though somewhat of a curious perplexity to his style.

The Orlando Furioso went through six editions in the author's lifetime, two of which he supervised, and it passed through sixty in the course of the same century. Its poetic pretensions were of too exalted a character to allow it to be regarded

■ "A thin transparent veil,
That all the beauties of her form discloses,
As the clear crystal doth th' imprison'd roses."

as a mere fairy tale; but it sorely puzzled the pedantic critics, both of that and of the succeeding age, to find out a justification for admitting it, with all its fantastic eccentricities, into the ranks of epic poetry. Multitudes have attacked and defended it upon this ground, and justice was not rendered to it until the more enlightened criticism of a later day set all things right by pointing out the distinction between the romantic and the classical.*

The cold and precise Boileau, who, like most of his countrymen, seems to have thought that beauty could wear only one form, and to have mistaken the beginnings of ancient art for its principles, quoted Horace to prove that no poet had the right to produce such grotesque combinations of the tragical and comic as are found in Ariosto.† In the last century, Voltaire, a critic of a much wider range of observation, objects to a narrow, exclusive definition of an epic poem, on the just ground "that works of imagination depend so much on the different languages and tastes of the different nations among whom they are produced, that precise definitions must have a tendency to exclude all beauties that are unknown or unfamiliar to us."—(*Essay sur la Poesie Epique.*) In less than forty pages farther we find, however, that "the Orlando Furioso, although popular with the mass of readers, is very inferior to the *genuine epic poem.*" Voltaire's general reflections were those of a philosopher; their particular application was that of a Frenchman.

At a later period of his life he made a recantation of this precipitate opinion; and he even went

* Hurd and T. Warton seem to have been among the earliest English writers who insisted upon the distinction between the Gothic and the classical. In their application of it to Spenser they displayed a philosophical criticism, guided not so much by ancient rules as by the peculiar genius of modern institutions. How superior this to the pedantic dogmas of the French school, or of such a caviller as Rymer, whom Dryden used to quote, and Pope extolled as "the best of English critics."

† Dissertation Critique sur l'Aventure de Joconde. *Œuvres de Boileau*, tom. ii., p. 151.

so far, in a parallel between the Furioso and the Odyssey, which he considered the *model* of the Italian poem, as to give a decided preference to the former. Ariosto's imitations of the Odyssey, however, are not sufficient to authorize its being considered the model of his epic. Where these imitations do exist, they are not always the happiest efforts of his muse. The tedious and disgusting adventure of the Ogre, borrowed from that of the Cyclops Polypheme, is one of the greatest blemishes in the Furioso. Such "Jack the giant killing" horrors do not blend happily with the airy and elegant fictions of the East. The *familiarity* of Ariosto's manner has an apparent resemblance to the *simplicity* of Homer's, which vanishes upon nearer inspection. The unaffected ease common to both resembles, in the Italian, the fashionable breeding that grows out of a perfect intimacy with the forms of good society. In the Greek it is rather an artlessness which results from never having been embarrassed by the conventional forms of society at all. Ariosto is perpetually addressing his reader in the most familiar tone of conversation; Homer pursues his course with the undeviating dignity of an epic poet. He tells all his stories, even the incredible, with an air of confiding truth. The Italian poet frequently qualifies his with some sly reference or apology, as "I will not vouch for it; I repeat only what Turpin has told before me;"

"Mettendo lo Turpin, lo metto anch' io."*

Ariosto's narratives are complicated and interrupted in a most provoking manner. This has given offence to some of his warmest admirers, and to the severe taste of Alfieri in particular.

* Voltarie, with all his aversion to local prejudices, was too national to relish the naked simplicity of Homer. One of his witty reflections may show how he esteemed him. Speaking of Virgil's obligations to the Greek poet, "Some say," he observes, "that Homer made Virgil: if so, this is, without doubt, the best work he ever made!" *si cela est, c'est sans doute son plus bel ouvrage.*

Yet this fault, if indeed it be one, seems imputable to the art, not to the artist. He but followed preceding romancers, and conformed to the laws of his peculiar species of poetry. This involution of the narrative may be even thought to afford a relief and an agreeable contrast, by its intermixture of grave and comic incidents; at least, this is the apology set up for the same peculiarities of our own romantic drama. But, whatever exceptions may be taken by the acuteness or ignorance of critics at the conduct of the *Orlando Furioso*, the sagacity of its general plan is best vindicated by its wide and permanent popularity in its own country. None of their poets is so universally read by the Italians; and the epithet *divine*, which the homage of an enlightened few had before appropriated to Dante, has been conferred by the voice of the whole nation upon the "Homer of Ferrara."* While those who copied the classical models of antiquity are forgotten, Ariosto, according to the beautiful eulogium of Tasso, "Partendo dalle vestigie degli Antichi Scrittori e dalle regole d'Aristotile, è letto e riletto da tutte l'età, da tutti i sessi, noto a tutte le lingue, ringiovanisce sempre nella sua fama, e vola glorioso per le lingue de' mortali."†

The name of Ariosto most naturally suggests this of Tasso, his illustrious but unfortunate rival in the same brilliant career of epic poetry; for these two seem to hold the same relative rank, and to shed a luster over the Italian poetry of the sixteenth century, like that reflected by Dante and Petrarch upon the fourteenth. The interest always attached to the misfortunes of genius has been heightened, in the case of Tasso, by the veil of mystery thrown over them; and while his sorrows have been consecrated by the "melodious tear" of the poet, the causes of them have furnished a most fruitful subject of speculation to the historian.

* The name originally given to him by his rival, Tasso.

† 'Discorsi Poetici, p. 33.

He had been early devoted by his father to the study of jurisprudence, but, as with Arisosto, a love for the Muses seduced him from his severer duties. His father remonstrated; but Tasso, at the age of seventeen, produced his *Rinaldo*, an epic in twelve cantos, and the admiration which it excited throughout Italy silenced all future opposition on the part of his parent. In 1565, Tasso, then twenty-one years of age, was received into the family of the Cardinal Luigi d'Este, to whom he had dedicated his precocious epic. The brilliant assemblage of rank and beauty at the little court of Ferrara excited the visions of the youthful poet, while its richly endowed libraries and learned societies furnished a more solid nourishment to his understanding. Under these influences, he was perpetually giving some new display of his poetic talent. His vein flowed freely in lyrical composition, and he is still regarded as one of the most perfect models in that saturated species of national poetry. In 1573 he produced his *Aminta*, which, in spite of its conceits and pastoral extravagances, exhibited such a union of literary finish and voluptuous sentiment as was to be found in no other Italian poem. It was translated into all the cultivated tongues in Europe, and was followed, during the lifetime of its author, by more than twenty imitations in Italy. No valuable work ever gave birth to a more worthless progeny. The *Pastor Fido* of Guarini is by far the best of these imitations; but its elaborate luxury of wit is certainly not comparable to the simple, unsolicited beauties of the original. Tasso was, however, chiefly occupied with the composition of his great epic. He had written six cantos in a few months, but he was nearly ten years in completing it. He wrote with the rapidity of genius, but corrected with scrupulous deliberation. His *Letters* show the unwearied pains which he took to obtain the counsel of his friends, and his critical *Discourses* prove that no one could stand less in need of such counsel than himself. In 1575 he completed his *Jerusa-*

lem Delivered. Thus, before he had reached his thirty-second year, Tasso, as a lyric, epic and dramatic writer, may be fairly said to have earned a threefold immortality in the highest walks of his art. His subsequent fate shows that literary glory rests upon no surer basis than the accidental successes of worldly ambition.

The long and rigorous imprisonment of Tasso, by the sovereign over whose reign his writings had thrown such a luster, has been as fruitful a source of speculation as the inexplicable exile of Ovid, and in like manner was, for a long time, imputed to an indiscreet and too aspiring passion in the poet. At length Tiraboschi announced, in an early edition of his history, that certain letters and original manuscripts of Tasso, lately discovered in the library of Modena, had been put into the hands of the Abbé Serassi for the farther investigation of the mysterious transaction. The abbé's work appeared in 1785, and the facts disclosed by it clearly prove that the poet's passion for Leonora was not, as formerly imagined, the origin of his misfortune.* These may be imputed to a variety of circumstances, none of which, however, would have deeply affected a person of a less irritable or better disciplined fancy. The calumnies and petty insults which he experienced from his rivals at the court of Ferrara, a clandestine attempt to publish his poem, but more than all, certain conscientious scruples which he entertained as to the orthodoxy of his own creed,

*We are only acquainted with Serassi's "Life of Tasso" through the epitomes of Fabroni and Ginguené. The latter writer seems to us to lay greater stress upon the poet's passion for Leonora than is warranted by his facts. Tasso dedicated, it is true, many an elegant sonnet to her charms, and distorted her name into as many ingenious puns as did Petrarch that of his mistress; but when we consider that this sort of poetical tribute is very common with the Italians, that the lady was at least ten years older than the poet, and that, in the progress of this passion, he had four or five other well-attested subordinate flames, we shall have little reason to believe it produced a deep impression on his character.

gradually wrought upon his feverish imagination to such a degree as in a manner to unsettle his reason. He fancied that his enemies were laying snares for his life, and that they had concerted a plan for accusing him of heresy before the Inquisition.* He privately absconded from Ferrara, returned to it again, but, soon after, disquieted by the same unhappy suspicions, left it precipitately a second time, without his manuscripts, without money, or any means of subsistence, and, after wandering from court to court, and experiencing, in the sorrowful language of Dante,

“Come sà di sale
Lo pane altrui, e com’ è duro calle,
Lo scendere e ’l salir per l’altrui scale,”†

he threw himself once more upon the clemency of Alphonso; but the duke, already alienated from him by his past extravagances, was incensed to such a degree by certain intemperate expressions of anger in which the poet indulged on his arrival at the court, that he caused him to be confined in a madhouse (*Hospital of St. Anne*).

Here, in the darkness and solitude of its meanest cell, disturbed only by the cries of the wretched inmates of the mansion, he languished two years under the severest discipline of a refractory lunatic. Montaigne, in his visit to Italy, saw him in this humiliating situation, and his reflections upon it are even colder than those which usually fall from the phlegmatic philosopher.‡

* His “Letters” betray the same timid jealousy. He is perpetually complaining that his correspondence is watched and intercepted.

† “How salt the savour is of other’s bread,
How hard the passage to descend and climb
By other’s stairs.”—CAREY.

‡ “I felt even more spite than compassion to see him in so miserable a state, surviving, as it were, himself, unmindful either of himself or his works, which, without his concurrence, and before his eyes, were published to the world incorrect and deformed.”—*Essais de Montaigne*, tom. v., p. 114. Montaigne doubtless exaggerated the mental degradation of Tasso, since it favored a position which, in the

The genius of Tasso, however, broke through the gloom of his dungeon, and several of the lyrical compositions of his imprisoned muse were as brilliant and beautiful as in the day of her prosperity. The distempered state of his imagination seems never to have clouded the vividness of his perceptions on the subjects of his composition, and during the remaining five years of his confinement at St. Anne, he wrote, in the form of dialogues, several highly-esteemed disquisitions on philosophical and moral theorems. During this latter period Tasso had enjoyed a more commodious apartment, but the duke, probably dreading some literary reprisal from his injured prisoner, resisted all entreaties for his release. This was at length effected, through the intercession of the Prince of Mantua, in 1586.

Tasso quitted Ferrara without an interview with his oppressor, and spent the residue of his days in the south of Italy. His countrymen, affected by his unmerited persecutions, received him wherever he passed with enthusiastic triumph. The nobility and the citizens of Florence waited upon him in a body, as if to make amends for the unjust strictures of their academy upon his poem, and a day was appointed by the court of Rome for his solemn coronation in the capitol with the poetic wreath which had formerly encircled the brow of Petrarch. He died a few days before the intended ceremony. His body, attired in a Roman toga, was accompanied to the grave by nobles and ecclesiastics of the highest dignity, and his temples were decorated with the laurel, of which his perverse fortune had defrauded him when living.

The unhappy fate of Tasso has affixed a deep stain on the character of Alphonso the Second. The eccentricities of his deluded fancy could not have justified seven years of solitary confinement,

vain love of paradox that has often distinguished his countrymen, he was then endeavoring to establish, viz., the superiority of stupidity and ignorance over genius.

either as a medicine or as a punishment, least of all from the man whose name he had so loudly celebrated in one of the most glorious productions of modern genius. What a caustic commentary upon his unrelenting rigor must Alphonso have found in one of the opening stanzas of the Jerusalem:

“Tu, magnanimo Alfonso, il qual ritogli
 Al furor di fortuna, e guidi in porto
 Me peregrino errante, e fra gli scogli
 E fra l'onde agitato, e quasi assorto;
 Queste mie carte in lieta fronte accogli,” etc.

The illiberal conduct of the princes of Este, both towards Ariosto and Tasso, essentially diminishes their pretensions to the munificent patronage so exclusively imputed to them by their own historians, and by the eloquent pen of Gibbon.* A more accurate picture, perhaps, of the second Alphonso may be found in the concluding canto of *Childe Harold*, where the poet, in the language of indignant sensibility, not always so judiciously directed, has rendered more than poetical justice to the “antique brood of Este.”

The Jerusalem was surreptitiously published, for the first time, during Tasso's imprisonment, and, notwithstanding the extreme inaccuracy of its early editions, it went through no less than six in as many months. Others grew rich on the productions of an author who was himself languishing in the most abject poverty; one example out of many of the insecurity of literary property in a country where the number of distinct inde-

* Muratori's *Antichità Estensi* are expressly intended to record the virtues of the family of Este. Tiraboschi's *Storia della Letteratura Italiana* is a splendid *panegyric* upon the intellectual achievements of the whole nation. More than a due share of this praise, however, is claimed for his native princes of Ferrara. It is amusing to see by what evasions the historian attempts to justify their conduct both toward Tasso and Ariosto. Gibbon, who had less apology for partiality, in his laborious researches into the “Antiquities of the House of Brunswick” has not tempered his encomiums of the Alphonsoes with a single animadversion upon their illiberal conduct toward their two illustrious subjects.

pendent governments almost defeat the protection of a copyright.*

Notwithstanding the general admiration which the Jerusalem excited throughout Italy, it was assailed, on its first appearance, with the coarsest criticism it ever experienced. A comparison was naturally suggested between it and the Orlando Furioso, and the Italians became divided into the factions of Tassisti and Ariostisti. The Della Cruscan Academy, just then instituted, in retaliation of some extravagant encomiums bestowed on the Jerusalem, entered into an accurate, but exceedingly intemperate analysis of it, in which they degraded it, not only below the rival epic, but, denying it the name of a *poem*, spoke of it as "a cold and barren compilation." It is a curious fact, that both the Della Cruscan and French Academies commenced their career of criticism with an unlucky attack upon two of the most extraordinary poems in their respective languages.†

Although Tasso was only one-and-twenty years of age when he set about writing his Jerusalem, yet it is sufficiently apparent, from the sagacious criticism exhibited in his letters, that he brought to it a mind ripened by extensive studies and careful meditation. He had, moreover, the advantage of an experience derived both from his own previous labors and those of several distinguished predecessors in the same kind of composition. The learned Trissino had fashioned, some years before, a regular heroic poem, with pedantic precision, upon the models of antiquity. From this circumstance, it was so formal and tedious that nobody could read it. Bernardo Tasso, the father of Torquato, who might apply to himself,

* "Foreigners," says Denina, "who ask if there are great writers in Italy now, as in times past, would be surprised at the number, were they to learn how much even the best of them are brought in debt by the publication of their own works."—*Vicende della Letteratura*, tom. ii., p. 326.

† It is hardly necessary to refer to Corneille's "*Cid*," so clumsily anatomized by the Académie Française at the jealous instigation of Cardinal Richelieu.

with *equal* justice, the reverse of the younger Racine's lament,

"Et moi père inconnu d'un si glorieux fils,"

had commenced his celebrated *Amadis* with the same deference to the rules of Aristotle. Finding that the audiences of his friends, to whom he was accustomed to read the epic as it advanced, gradually thinned off, he had the discretion to take the hint, and new cast it in a more popular and romantic form. Notwithstanding these inauspicious examples, Tasso was determined to give to his national literature what it so much wanted, a great heroic poem; his fine eye perceived at once, however, all the advantages to be derived from the peculiar institutions of the moderns, and, while he conformed, in the general plan of his epic, to the precepts of antiquity, he animated it with the popular and more exalted notions of love, of chivalry, and of religion. His *Jerusalem* exhibits a perfect combination of the romantic and the classical.

The subject which he selected was most happily adapted to his complicated design. However gloomy a picture the Crusades may exhibit to the rational historian, they are one of the most brilliant and imposing ever offered to the eye of the poet. It is surprising that a subject so fruitful in marvellous and warlike adventure, and which displays the full triumph of Christian chivalry, should have been so long neglected by the writers of epical romance. The plan of the *Jerusalem* is not without defects, which have been pointed out by the Italians, and bitterly ridiculed by Voltaire, whose volatile sarcasms have led him into one or two blunders, that have excited much wrath among some of Tasso's countrymen.* The con-

* Among other heinous slanders, he had termed the musical bird "*di color vari*" "*e purpureo rostro*" in *Armida's* gardens, a "*parrot*," and the "*fatal Donzella*" (canto xv.), "*whose countenance was beautiful like that of the angels*," an "*old woman*," which his Italian censor assures his countrymen "*is much worse than a vecchia*"

ceits which occasionally glitter on the surface of Tasso's clear and polished style have afforded another and a fair ground for censure. Boileau's metaphorical distich, however, has given to them an undeserved importance. The epithet *tinsel* (clinquant), used by him without any limitation, was quoted by his countrymen as fixing the value at once of all Tasso's compositions, and afterward, by an easy transition, of that of the whole body of Italian literature. Boileau subsequently diluted this censure of the Italian poet with some partial commendations;* but its ill effects were visible in the unfavorable prejudices which it left on the minds of his own countrymen, and on those of the English for nearly a century.

The affectations imputed to Tasso are to be traced to a much more remote origin. Petrarch's best productions are stained with them, as are those of preceding poets, Cino da Pistoja, Guido Cavalcanti and others,† and they seem to have flowed directly from the Provençale, the copious fountain of Italian lyrical poetry. Tiraboschi referred their introduction to the influence of Spanish literature under the viceroys of Naples during the latter part of the sixteenth century,

donna." For the burst of indignation which these and similar sins brought upon Voltaire's head, vide "*Annotazioni ai Canti*," xv., xvi. *Clas. Ital.*

* Both Ginguenè and some Italian critics affect to consider these commendations as an *amende honorable* on the part of Boileau. They, however, amount to very little, and, like the Frenchman's compliment to Yorick, have full as much of bitter as of sweet in them. The remarks quoted by D'Olivet (*Histoire de l'Académie Française*), as having been made by the critic a short time previous to his death, are a convincing proof, on the other hand, that he was tenacious to the last of his original heresy. "So little," said he, "have I changed, that, on reviewing Tasso of late, I regretted exceedingly that I had not been more explicit in my strictures upon him." He then goes on to supply the hiatus by taking up all the blemishes in detail which he had before only alluded to *en gros*.

† These veteran versifiers have been condensed into two volumes 8vo, in an edition published at Florence, 1816; under the title of *Poeti del Primo Secolo*.

which provoked a patriotic replication, in seven volumes, from the Spanish Abbé Lampillas. The Italian had the better of his adversary in temper, if not in argument. This false refinement was brought to its height during the first half of the seventeenth century, under Marini and his imitators, and it is somewhat maliciously intimated by Denina that the foundation of the Academy Della Crusca corresponds with the *commencement* of the decay of good taste.* Some of their early publications prove that they have at least as good a claim to be considered its promoters as Tasso.†

Tasso is the most lyrical of all epic poets. This often weakens the significance and picturesque delineation of his narrative, by giving to it an ideal and too general character. His eight line stanza is frequently wrought up, as it were, into a miniature sonnet. He himself censures Ariosto for occasionally indulging this lyrical vein in his romance, and cites as an example the celebrated comparison of the Virgin and the rose (can. i., s. 42). How many similar examples may be found in his own epic! The gardens of Armida are full of them. To this cause we may perhaps ascribe the glittering affectations, the

* *Vicende della Letteratura*, tom. ii., p. 52.

† A distinction seems to be authorized between the ancients and the moderns in regard to what is considered *purity of taste*. The earliest writings of the former are distinguished by it, and it fell into decay only with the decline of the nation; while a vicious taste is visible in the earliest stages of modern literature, and it has been corrected only by the corresponding refinement of the nation. The Greek language was written in classic purity from Homer until long after Greece herself had become tributary to the Romans, and the Latin tongue from the time of Terence till the nation had sacrificed its liberties to its emperors; while the early Italian authors, as we have already seen, the Spaniards in the age of Ferdinand, the English in that of Elizabeth, and the French under Francis the First (the epochs which may fix the dawn of their respective literatures), seem to have been deeply infected with a passion for conceits and quibbles, which have been purified only by the diligent cultivation of ages.

cliquant so often noticed in his poetry. Dazzling and epigrammatic points are often solicited in sonnets. To the same cause may be referred, in part, the nicely-adjusted harmony of his verses. It would almost seem as if each stanza was meant to be set to music, as Petrarch is known to have composed many of his odes with this view.* The melodious rhythm of Tasso's verse has none of the monotonous sweetness so cloying in Metastasio. It is diversified by all the modulations of an exquisitely sensible ear. For this reason, no Italian poet is so frequently in the mouths of the common people. Ariosto's familiar style and lively narrative are better suited to the popular apprehension; but the lyrical melody of Tasso triumphs over these advantages in his rival, and enables him literally *virtum volitare per ora*. It was once common for the Venetian gondoliers to challenge each other, and to respond in the verses of the Jerusalem, and this sort of musical contest might be heard for hours in the silence of a soft summer evening. The same beautiful ballads, if we may so call these fragments of an epic, are still occasionally chanted by the Italian peasant, who is less affected by the sublimity of their sentiments than the musical flow of the expression.†

Tasso's sentiments are distinguished, in our opinion, by a moral grandeur surpassing that of any other Italian poet. His devout mind seems to have been fully inspired with the spirit of his subject. We say in our opinion, for an eminent German critic, F. Schlegel, is disposed to deny him this merit. We think in this instance he must have proposed to himself what is too frequent with the Germans, an ideal and exaggerated standard of elevation. A few stanza (st. 1 to 19)

* Roscolo, "*Essay*," etc., p. 93.

† "The influence of metrical harmony is visible in the lower classes, who commit to memory the stanzas of Tasso, and sing them without comprehending them. They even disfigure the language so as to make nonsense of it, their senses deceived all the while by the unmeaning melody."—Pignotti, *Storia*, etc., tom. iv., p. 102.

in the fourth canto of the Jerusalem may be said to contain almost the whole argument of the Paradise Lost. The convocation of the devils in the dark abyss,* the picture of Satan, whom he injudiciously names Pluto, his sublime address to his confederates, in which he alludes to their rebellion and the subsequent creation of man, were the germs of Milton's most glorious conceptions. Dante had before shadowed forth Satan, but it was only in the physical terrors of a hideous aspect and gigantic stature. The ancients had clothed the Furies in the same external deformities. Tasso, in obedience to the same superstitions of his age, gave to the devil similar attributes, but he invested his character with a moral sublimity which raised it to the rank of divine intelligences:

“Ebbero i più felici allor vittoria
Rimase a noi d'invitto ardir la gloria.”
“Sia destin ciò ch'io voglio.”

In the literal version of Milton,

“What I will is fate.”

Sentiments like these also give to Satan, in Paradise Lost, his superb and terrific majesty. Milton, however, gave a finer finish to the portrait, by dispensing altogether with the bugbear deformities of his person, and by depicting it as a form that

“Had yet not lost
All its original brightness, nor appear'd
Less than archangel ruin'd.”

It seems to us a capital mistake in Tasso to have made so little use of the *diablerie* which he has so powerfully portrayed. Almost all the

* The semi-stanza, which describes the hoarse reverberations of the infernal trumpet in this Pandemonium, is cited by the Italians as a happy example of imitative harmony:

“Chiama gli abitator dell'ombre eterne.
Il rauco suon della tartarea tromba.
Treman le spaziose atre caverne,
E l'aer cieco a quel romor rimbomba.”

machinations of the infidels in the subsequent cantos turn upon the agency of petty necromancers.

Tasso frequently deepens the expression of his pictures by some skillful moral allusion. How finely has he augmented the misery of the soldier, perishing under a consuming drought before the walls of Jerusalem, by recalling to his imagination the cool and crystal waters with which he had once been familiar:

“Se alcun giammai tra frondeggianti rive
 Puro vide stagnar liquido argento,
 O giù precipitose ir acque vive
 Per Alpe, o'n piaggia erbosa a passo lento;
 Quelle al vago desio forma e descrive,
 E ministra materia al suo tormento;
 Che l'immagine lor gelida e molle
 L'asciuga e scalda, e nel pensier ribolle.”*

Can. xiii., st. 60.

In all the manifold punishments of Dante's “Hell” we remember one only in which the *mind* is made use of as a means of torture. A counterfeiter (*barratiere*) contrasts his situation in these dismal regions with his former pleasant residence in the green vale of the Arno; an allusion which adds a new sting to his anguish, and gives a fine moral coloring to the picture. Dante was the first great Christian poet that had written; and when, in conformity with the charitable spirit of his age, he assigned all the ancient heathens a place either in his *hell* or *purgatory*, he inflicted upon them corporeal punishments which alone had been threatened by their poets.

Both Ariosto and Tasso elaborated the style of their compositions with infinite pains. This

* “He that the gliding rivers erst had seen
 Adown their verdant channels gently roll'd,
 Or falling streams, which to the valleys green
 Distill'd from tops of Alpine mountains cold,
 Those he desired in vain, new torments been
 Augmented thus with wish of comforts old;
 Those waters cool he drank in vain conceit,
 Which more increased his thirst, increased his heat.”
 —*Fairfax*.

labor, however, led them to the most opposite results. It gave to the *Furioso* the airy graces of elegant conversation; to the *Gerusalemme* a stately and imposing eloquence. In this last you may often find a consummate art carried into affectation, as in the former natural beauty is sometimes degraded into vulgarity, and even obscenity. Ariosto has none of the national vices of style imputed to his rival, but he is tainted with the less excusable impurities of sentiment. It is stated by a late writer that the exceptionable passages in the *Furioso* were found crossed out with a pen in a manuscript copy of the author, showing his intention to have suppressed them at some future period. The fact does not appear probable, since the edition, as it now stands, with all its original blemishes, was revised and published by himself the year of his death.

Tasso possessed a deeper, a more abstracted, and lyrical turn of thought. Ariosto infuses an active, worldly spirit into his poetry; his beauties are social, while those of his rival are rather of a solitary complexion. Ariosto's muse seems to have caught the gossiping spirit of the *fabliaux*; and Tasso's the lyrical refinements of the *Provençale*. Ariosto is seldom sublime like the other. This may be imputed to his subject, as well as to the character of his genius. Owing to his subject, he is more generally entertaining. The easy freedom of his narrative often leads him into natural details much more affecting than the ideal generalization of Tasso. How pathetic is the dying scene of Brandimarte, with the half-finished name of his mistress, *Fiordiligi*, upon his lip:

“Orlando, fa che ti raccordi
Di me nell' orazion tue grate a Dio;
Nè men ti raccomando la mia Fiordi . . .
Ma dir non poté *ligi*; e qui finì.”*

* “Orlando, I implore thee
That in thy prayers my name may be commended,
And to thy care I leave my loved *Fiordi*—
Ligi he could not add; but here he ended.”

Tasso could never have descended to this beautiful negligence of expression.*

Tasso challenged a comparison with his predecessor in his gardens of Armida. The indolent and languishing repose of the one, the brisk, amorous excitement of the other, are in some measure characteristic of their different pencils. The parallel has been too often pursued for us to weary our readers with it. The Italians have a copious variety of narrative poetry, and are very nice in their subdivisions of it. Without attending to these, we have been guided by its chronological succession. We have hardly room to touch upon the "*Secchia Rapita*" (*Rape of the Bucket*) of Tassoni, the model of the mock-heroic poems afterward frequent in Italy,† of Boileau's

* The *ideal*, which we have imputed to Tasso, may be cited, however, as a characteristic of the national literature, and as the point in which their literature is most decidedly opposed to our own. With the exception of Dante and Parini, whose copies from life have all the precision of proof impressions, it would be difficult to find a picture in the compass of Italian poetry executed with the fidelity to nature so observable in our good authors, so apparent in every page of Cowper or Thomson, for example. It might be well, perhaps, for the English artist, if he could embellish the minute and literal details of his own school with some of the ideal graces of the Italian. Byron may be considered as having done this more effectually than any contemporary poet. Byron's love of the ideal, it must be allowed, however, has too often bewildered him in mysticism and hyperbole.

† The Italians long disputed with great acrimony whether this or the comic heroic poem of Bracciolini (*Lo Scherno degli Dei*) was precedent in point of age. It appears probable that Tassoni's was written first, although printed last. No country has been half so fruitful as Italy in literary quarrels, and in none have they been pursued with such bitterness and pertinacity. In some instances, as in that of Marini, they have even been maintained by assassination. The sarcastic commentaries of Galileo upon the "*Jerusalem*," quoted in the vulgar edition of the "*Classics*," were found sadly mutilated by one of the offended *Tassisti*, into whose hands they had fallen more than two centuries after they were written; so long does a literary faction last in Italy! The Italians, inhibited from a free discussion on political or religious topics, enter

Lutrin, and of the *Rape of the Lock*. Tassoni, its author, was a learned and noble Modenese, who, after a life passed in the heats of literary controversies, to which he had himself given rise, died 1635, aged seventy-one. The subject of the poem is a war between Modena and Bologna, at the commencement of the thirteenth century, in consequence of a wooden bucket having been carried off from the market-place in the latter city by an invading party of the former. This memorable trophy has been preserved down to the present day in the Cathedral of Modena. Tassoni's epic will confer upon it a more lasting existence.

"The Bucket, which so sorely had offended,
 In the Great Tower, where yet it may be found,
 Was from on high by ponderous chain suspended,
 And with a marble cope environ'd round.
 By portals five the entrance is defended;
 Nor cavalier of note is that way bound,
 Nor pious pilgrim, but doth pause to see
 The spoil so glorious of the victory."—Canto I., st. 63

Gironi, in his life of the poet, triumphantly adduces, in evidence of the superiority of the Italian epic over the French mock-heroic poem of Boileau, that the subject of the former is far more insignificant than that of the latter, and yet the poem has twelve cantos, being twice the number of the *Lutrin*. He might have added that each canto contains about six hundred lines instead of two hundred, the average complement of the French, so that Tassoni's epic has the glory of being twelve times as long as Boileau's, and all about a bucket! This is somewhat characteristic of the Italians. What other people would good-humoredly have endured such an interminable epic upon so trivial an affair, which had taken place more than four centuries before? To make amends, however, for the want of pungency in a satire on transactions of such an antiquated date,

with incredible zeal into those of a purely abstract and often unimportant character.

Tassoni has besprinkled his poem very liberally with allusions to living characters.

We may make one general objection to the poem, that it is often too much in earnest for the perfect keeping of the mock heroic. The cutting of throats and fighting regular pitched battles are too bloody a business for a joke. How much more in the genuine spirit of this species of poetry is the bloodless battle with the books in the *Lutrin*!

The machinery employed by Tassoni is composed of the ancient heathen deities. These are frequently brought upon the stage, and are travestied with the coarsest comic humor. But the burlesque which reduces great things to little is of a grosser and much less agreeable sort than that which magnifies little things to great. The "Rape of the Lock" owes its charms to the latter process. The importance which it gives to the elegant nothings of high life, its perpetual sparkling of wit, the fairy fretwork which constitutes its machinery, have made it superior, as a fine piece of irony, to either of its foreign rivals. A Frenchman would doubtless prefer the epic regularity, progressive action, and smooth seesaw versification of the *Lutrin*;^{*} while an Italian would find sufficient in the grand heroic sentiment and the voluptuous portraiture with which Tassoni's unequal poem is occasionally inlaid, to justify his preference of it. There is no accounting for national taste. La Harpe, the Aristarchus of French critics, censures the gossamer *machinery* of the "Rape of the Lock" as the greatest defect in the poem. "La fable des Sylphes, que Pope a très inutilement empruntée du Conte de Gubalis, pour en faire le merveilleux de son poëme, n'y produit rien d'agréable, rien d'intéressant!"

^{*} The versification of the *Lutrin* is esteemed as faultless as any in the language. The tame and monotonous flow of the best of French rhyme, however, produces an effect, at least upon a foreign ear, which has been well likened by one of their own nation to "the drinking of cold water."

Italy, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, was inundated with crude and insipid romances, distributed into all the varieties of epic poetry. The last one, however, of sufficient importance to require our notice, namely, the *Ricciardetto* of Nicholas Fortiguerra, appeared as late as 1738. After two centuries of marvellous romance, Charlemagne and his paladins became rather insipid dramatis personæ. What could not be handled seriously, however, might be ridiculed; and the smile, half suppressed by Ariosto and Berni, broke out into broad buffoonery in the poem of Fortiguerra.

The *Ricciardetto* may be considered the Don Quixote of Italy; for although it did not bring about that revolution in the national taste ascribed to the Spanish romance, yet it is, like that, an unequivocal parody upon the achievements of knight errantry. It may be doubted whether Don Quixote itself was not the consequence rather than the cause of the revolution in the national taste. Fortiguerra pursued an opposite method to Cervantes, and, instead of introducing his crack-brained heroes into the realities of vulgar life, he made them equally ridiculous by involving them in the most absurd caricatures of romantic fiction. Many of these adventures are of a licentious, and sometimes of a disgusting nature; but the graceful though negligent beauties of his style throw an illusive veil over the grossness of the narrative. Imitations of Pulci may be more frequently traced than of any other romantic poet. But, although more celebrated writers are occasionally, and the extravagances of chivalry are perpetually parodied by Fortiguerra, yet his object does not seem to have been deliberate satire so much as good-humored jesting. What he wrote was for the simple purpose of raising a laugh, not for the derision or the correction of the taste of his countrymen. The tendency of his poem is certainly satirical, yet there is not a line indicating such an intention on his part. The most pointed humor is aimed at the clergy. Forti-

guerra was himself a canon.* He commenced his epic at the suggestion of some friends with whom he was passing a few weeks of the autumn at a hunting seat. The conversation turned upon the labor bestowed by Pulci, Berni, and Ariosto on their great poems; and Fortiguerra undertook to furnish, the next day, a canto of good poetry, exhibiting some of the peculiarities of their respective styles. He fulfilled his promise, and his friends, delighted with its sprightly graces, persuaded him to pursue the epic to its present complement of thirty cantos. Any one acquainted with the facilities for *improvisation* afforded by the flexible organization of the Italian tongue will be the less surprised at the rapidity of this composition. The "Ricciardetto" may be looked upon as a sort of improvisation.

In the following literal version of the two opening stanzas of the poem we have attempted to convey some notion of the sportive temper of the original:

"It will not let my busy brain alone;
The whim has taken me to write a tale
In poetry, of things till now unknown,
Or if not wholly new, yet nothing stale.
My muse is not a daughter of the Sun,
With harp of gold and ebony; a hale
And buxom country lass, she sports at ease,
And, free as air, sings to the passing breeze.

"Yet, though accustom'd to the wood—its spring
Her only beverage, and her food its mast,
She will of heroes and of battles sing,
The loves and high emprises of the past.

* One of the leading characters is Ferragus, who had figured in all the old epics as one of the most formidable Saracen chieftains. He turns hermit with Fortiguerra, and beguiles his lonely winter evenings with the innocent pastime of making candles.

"E ne l'orrida bruma
Quando l'aria è piu fredda, e piu crudele,
Io mi diverto in far de le candeale."—III., 53.

A contrast highly diverting to the Italians, who had been taught to associate very lofty ideas with the name of Ferragus. The conflict kept up between the devout scruples of the new saint and his old heathen appetites affords perpetual subjects for the profane comi.

Then if she falter on so bold a wing,
 Light be the blame upon her errors cast;
 She never studied; and she well may err,
 Whose home hath been beneath the oak and fir."

Fortiguerra's introductions to his cantos are seasoned with an extremely pleasant wit, which Lord Byron has attentively studied, and, in some passages of his more familiar poetry, closely imitated. The stanza, for example, in Beppo, beginning

"She was not old, nor young, nor at the years
 Which certain people call a *certain age*,
 Which yet the most uncertain age appears," etc.,

was evidently suggested by the following in Ricciardetto:

"Quando si giugne ad una *certa età*,
 Ch'io non voglio descrivervi qual è,
 Bisogna stare allora a quel ch'un ha,
 Nè d'altro amante provar più la fè,
 Perchè, donne me care, la beltà
 Ha l' ali al capo, alle spalle, ed a' piè;
 E vola sì, che non si scorge più
 Vestigio alcun ne' visi, dove fu."

Byron's wit, however, is pointed with a keener sarcasm, and his serious reflections show a finer perception, both of natural and moral beauty, than belong to the Italian. No two things are more remote from each other than sentiment and satire. In "Don Juan" they are found side by side in almost every stanza. The effect is disagreeable. The heart, warmed by some picture of extreme beauty or pathos, is suddenly chilled by a selfish sneer, a cold-blooded maxim, that makes you ashamed of having been duped into a good feeling by the writer even for a moment. It is a melancholy reflection that the last work of this extraordinary poet should be the monument alike of his genius and his infamy. Voltaire's licentious epic, the "Pucelle," is written in a manner, perhaps, more nearly corresponding to that of the Italian; but the philosophical irony, if we may so call it, which forms the substratum of the more familiar compositions of this witty and profligate

author, is of somewhat too deep a cast for the light, superficial banter of Fortiguerra.

We have now traced the course of Italian narrative poetry down to the middle of the last century. It has by no means become extinct since that period, and, among others, an author well known here by his history of our Revolutionary war has contributed his share to the epopee of his country in his "Camillo, o Vejo Conquistata." Almost every Italian writer has a poetic vein within him, which, if it does not find a vent in sonnets or canzones, will flow out into more formidable compositions.*

In glancing over the long range of Italian narrative poems, one may be naturally led to the reflection that the most prolific branch of the national literature is devoted *exclusively* to purposes of mere amusement. Brilliant inventions, delicate humor, and a beautiful coloring of language are lavished upon all; but with the exception of the "Jerusalem," we rarely meet with sublime or ennobling sentiment, and very rarely with anything like a moral or philosophical purpose. Madame de Staël has attempted to fasten a reproach on the whole body of Italian letters, "that, with the exception of their works on physical science, they have never been directed to *utility*."† The imputation applied in this almost unqualified manner is unjust. The language has been enriched by the valuable reflections of too many historians, the solid labors of too many antiquaries and critics, to be thus lightly designated. The learned lady may have found a model for her own comprehensive manner of philosophizing, and an ample refutation of her assertion in Machiavelli alone.‡ In their works of imagination, however,

* Boccaccio, Machiavelli, Bembo, Varchi, Castiglione, Pignotti, Botta, and a host of other *classic* prose writers of Italy, have all confessed the "impetus sacer," and given birth to epics, lyrics, or bucolics.

† "Tous les ouvrages des Italiens, excepté ceux qui traitent des sciences physiques, n'ont jamais pour but l'utilité."—*De la Littérature*, etc.

‡ We say *manner*, not spirit. The "Discorsi sopra T.

such an imputation appears to be well merited. The Italians seemed to demand from these nothing farther than from a fine piece of music, where the heart is stirred, the ear soothed, but the understanding not a whit refreshed. The splendid apparitions of their poet's fancy fade away from the mind of the reader, and, like the enchanted fabrics described in their romances, leave not a trace behind them.

In the works of fancy in our language, fiction is almost universally made subservient to more important and nobler purposes. The ancient drama, and novels, the modern prose drama, exhibit historical pictures of manners and accurate delineations of character. Most of the English poets in other walks, from the "moral Gower" to Cowper, Crabbe, and Wordsworth, have made their verses the elegant vehicles of religious or practical truth. Even descriptive poetry in England interprets the silence of external nature into a language of sentiment and devotion. It is characteristic of this spirit in the nation that Spenser, the only one of their classic writers who has repeated the fantastic legends of chivalry, deemed it necessary to veil his Italian fancy in a cloud of allegory, which, however it may be thought to affect the poem, shows unequivocally the didactic intention of the poet.

These grave and extended views are seldom visible in the ornamental writing of the Italians. It rarely conveys useful information, or inculcates

Livio," however, require less qualification on the score of their principles. They obviously furnished the model to the "*Grandeur et Décadence des Romains*," and the same extended philosophy which Montesquieu imitated in civil history, Madame de Staël has carried into literary.

Among the historians, antiquaries, etc., whose names are known where the language is not read, we might cite Guicciardini, Bembo, Sarpi, Giannone, Nardi, Davila, Denina, Muratori, Tiraboschi, Gravina, Bettinelli, Algarotti, Beccaria, Filanghieri, Cesarotti, Pignotti, and many others; a hollow muster-roll of names that it would be somewhat ridiculous to run over, did not their wide celebrity expose, in a stronger light, Madame de Staël's sweeping assertion.

moral or practical truth; but it is too commonly an elegant, unprofitable pastime. Novelle, lyrical, and epic poetry may be considered as constituting three principal streams of their lighter literature. These have continued to flow, with little interruption, the two first from the "golden urns" of Petrarch and Boccaccio, the last from the early sources we have already traced down to the present day. Their multitudinous novelle, with all their varieties of tragic and comic incident, the last by far the most frequent, present few just portraiture of character, still fewer examples of sound ethics or wise philosophy.* In the exuberance of their sonnets and canzone, we find some, it is true, animated by an efficient spirit of religion or patriotism; but too frequently they are of a purely amatory nature, the unsubstantial though brilliant exhalations of a heated fancy. The pastoral drama, the opera, and other beautiful varieties of invention, which, under the titles of *Bernesco*, *Burlesco*, *Maccheronico*, and the like have been nicely classed according to their different modifications of style and humor, while they manifest the mercurial temper and the originality of the nation, confirm the justice of our position.

The native melody of the Italian tongue, by seducing their writers into an overweening attention to sound, has doubtless been in one sense prejudicial to their literature. We do not mean to imply, in conformity with a vulgar opinion, that the language is deficient in energy or compactness. Its harmony is no proof of its weakness. It allows more licenses of contraction than any other European tongue, and retains more than any other the vigorous inversions of its Latin original. Dante is the most concise of early

* The heavier charge of indecency lies upon many. The *Novelle* of Casti, published as late as 1804, make the foulest tales of Boccaccio appear fair beside them. They have run through several editions since their first appearance, and it tells not well for the land that a numerous class of readers can be found in it who take delight in banqueting upon such abominable offal.

moderns, and we know none superior to Alfieri in this respect among those of our own age. Davanzati's literal translation of Tacitus is condensed into a smaller compass than its original, the most sententious of ancient histories; but still the silver tones of a language that almost sets itself to music as it is spoken, must have an undue attraction for the harmonious ear of an Italian. Their very first classical model of prose composition is an obvious example of it.

The frequency of *improvisation* is another circumstance that has naturally tended to introduce a less serious and thoughtful habit of composition. Above all, the natural perceptions of an Italian seem to be peculiarly sensible to *beauty*, independent of every other quality. Any one who has been in Italy must have recognized the glimpses of a pure taste through the rags of the meanest beggar. The musical pieces, when first exhibited at the theater of St. Carlos, are correctly pronounced upon by the Lazzaroni of Naples, and the mob of Florence decide with equal accuracy upon the productions of their immortal school. Cellini tells us that he exposed his celebrated statue of Perseus in the public square by order of his patron, Duke Cosmo First, who declared himself perfectly satisfied with it on learning the commendations of the people.* It is not extraordinary that this exquisite sensibility to the beautiful should have also influenced them in literary art, and have led them astray sometimes from the substantial and the useful. Who but an Italian historian would, in this practical age, so far blend fact and fiction as, for the sake of rhetorical effect, to introduce into the mouths of his personages sentiments and speeches never uttered by them, as Botta has lately done in his history of the American War?

In justice, however, to the Italians, we must admit, that the reproach incurred by too concentrated an attention to beauty, to the exclusion of more enlarged and useful views in their lighter com-

* *Vita di Benzo., Cellin., tom. ii., p. 339.*

positions, does not fall upon this or the last century. They have imbibed a graver and more philosophical cast of reflection, for which they seem partly indebted to the influence of English literature. Several of their most eminent authors have either visited or resided in Great Britain, and the genius of the language has been made known through the medium of skillful translations. Alfieri has transported into his tragedies the solemn spirit and vigorous characterization peculiar to the English. He somewhere remarks that "he could not read the language;" but we are persuaded his stern pen would never have traced the dying scene of Saul, had he not witnessed a representation of Macbeth. Ippolito Pindemonte, in his descriptive pieces, has deepened the tones of his native idiom with the moral melancholy of Gray and Cowper. Monti's compositions, both dramatic and miscellaneous, bear frequent testimony to his avowed admiration for Shakspeare; and Cesarotti, Foscolo, and Pignotti have introduced the "severer muses," of the north to a still wider and more familiar acquaintance with their countrymen.* Lastly, among the works of fancy which attest the practical scope of Italian letters in the last century, we must not omit the "Giorno" of Parini, the most curious and nicely-elaborated specimen of *didactic* satire produced in any age or country. Its polished irony, pointed at the domestic vices of the Italian nobility, indicates both the profligacy of the nation and the moral independence of the poet.

The Italian language, the first-born of those descended from the Latin, is also the most beautiful. It is not surprising that a people endowed

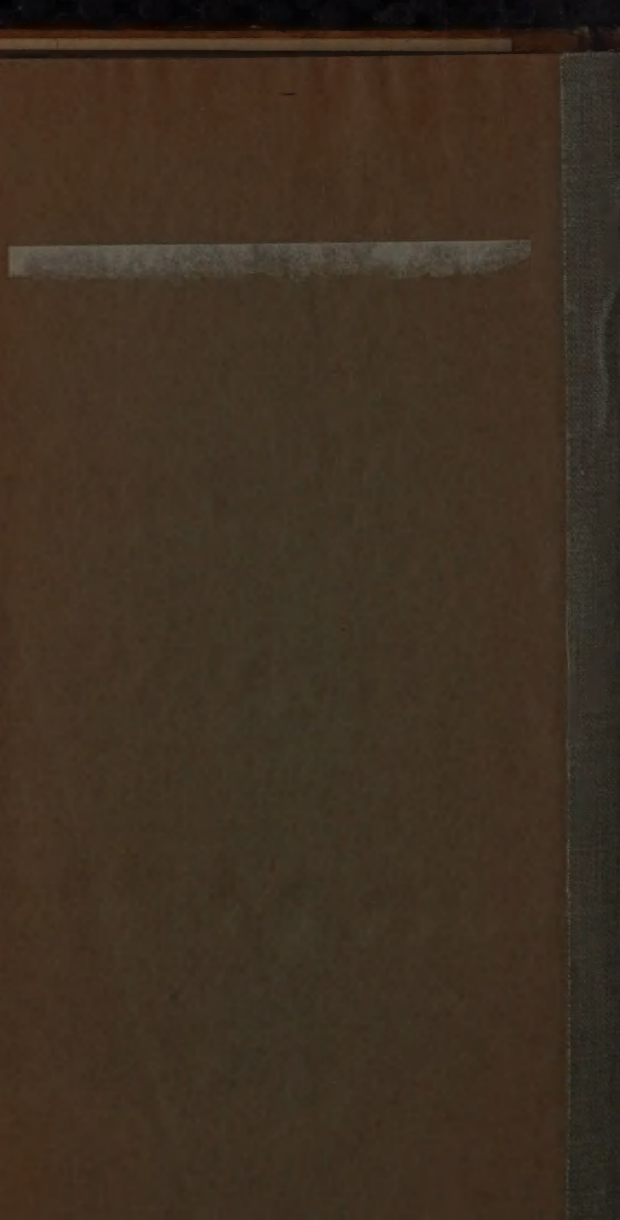
* Both the prose and poetry of Foscolo are pregnant with more serious meditation and warmer patriotism than is usual in the works of the Italians. Pignotti, although his own national manner has been but little affected by his foreign erudition, has contributed more than any other to extend the influence of English letters among his countrymen. His works abound in allusions to them, and two of his principal poems are dedicated to the memory of Shakspeare and of Pope.

with an exquisite sensibility to beauty should have been often led to regard this language rather as a means of pleasure than of utility. We must not, however, so far yield to the unqualified imputation of Madame de Staël as to forget that they have other claims to our admiration than what arise from the inventions of the poet, or from the ideal beauties which they have revived of Grecian art; that the light of *genius*, shed upon the world in the fourteenth, and that of *learning* in the fifteenth century, was all derived from Italy; that her writers first unfolded the sublimity of Christian doctrines as applied to modern literature, and by their patient, philological labors restored to life the buried literature of antiquity; that her schools revived and expounded the ancient code of law, since become the basis of so important a branch of jurisprudence both in Europe and our own country; that she *originated* literary, and brought to a perfection unequalled in any other language, unless it be our own, civil and political history; that she led the way in physical science and in that of political philosophy; and, finally, that of the two enlightened navigators who divide the glory of adding a new quarter to the globe, the one was a Genoese and the other a Florentine.

In following down the stream of Italian narrative poetry, we have wandered into so many details, especially where they would tend to throw light on the intellectual character of the nation, that we have little room, and our readers, doubtless, less patience, left for a discussion of the poems which form the text of our article. The few stanzas descriptive of Berni, which we have borrowed from the *Innamorato*, may give some notion of Mr. Rose's manner. The translations have been noticed in several of the English journals, and we perfectly accord with the favorable opinion of them, which has been so often expressed that it needs not here be repeated.

The composite style of Ariosto owes its charms to the skill with which the delicate tints of his irony are mixed with the sober coloring of his

narrative. His translators have spoiled the harmony of the composition by overcharging one or other of these ingredients. Harrington has caricatured his original into burlesque; Hoole has degraded him into a most melancholy proser. The popularity of this latter version has been of infinite disservice to the fame of Ariosto, whose ærial fancy loses all its buoyancy under the heavy hexameters of the English translator. The purity of Mr. Rose's taste has prevented him from exaggerating even the beauties of his original.



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